

First Steps

An easy day-by-day introduction to
Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

Compiled by SGI South Africa
www.sgi-sa.org.za

1st edition, March 2005; 2nd edition January 2008

STUDY DAYS

Introduction	vii
The structure of this book	vii
Things to remember	viii
The SGI Charter	x
Glossary of names and terms	xii
Bibliography and abbreviations	xiv
Acknowledgements	xv
1 100 days of study	1
2 Discussion meetings	1
3 Tussles, troubles & doubts	3
4 Seeking good friends	5
5 Nam-myoho-renge-kyo I	6
6 ~ Nichiren Daishonin	7
7 ~ Nichiren's life and teachings	8
8 The power of faith	9
9 ~ Who was Shakyamuni Buddha?	10
10 THE IMAGE IN THE MIRROR BOWING TO ME	11
11 The Lotus Sutra	14
12 Gongyo – Daily Revitalisation	15
13 Kosen-rufu	16
14 Karma and Taking Responsibility	18
15 The Ten Worlds	19

16 The Soka Gakkai International	22
17 Mastering one's mind	23
18 ~ Shakyamuni seeks wisdom	24
19 ~ Shakyamuni under a pipal tree	26
20 LEARNING WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME	27
21 Single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha	29
22 Oneness of self and environment	30
23 Nam-myoho-renge-kyo II	31
24 Overcoming Illness	32
25 ~ Shakyamuni's enlightenment	33
26 Dealing with death	35
27 Transforming yourself	37
28 Turning Poison into Medicine	38
29 ~ Shakyamuni's first teachings	38
30 LEARNING TO LOOK AFTER MYSELF	40
31 ~ Shakyamuni's persecutions	41
32 Earthly Desires are Enlightenment	42
33 The courage to overcome hatred and slander	43
34 Buddhist unity (itai doshin)	45
35 The Equality of Believers	46

36 Mentor and Disciple – Finding a Role Model	47
37 ~ Shakyamuni and the Lotus Sutra	49
38 ~ The passing of Buddha Shakyamuni	50
39 Buddhism and Women	51
40 MY BRILLIANT CAREER	52
41 ~ Nichiren confirms Shakyamuni’s prophecy	54
42 ~ Nichiren Daishonin at Tatsunokuchi	55
43 Changing and improving relationships	57
44 ~ Buddhism spreads after Shakyamuni’s death	58
45 ~ Kumarajiva, translator of the Lotus Sutra	59
46 The Treasure Tower emerges at the Ceremony in the Air	60
47 Sex, Sexuality and Gender I	61
48 ~ Buddhism in China: T’ien-t’ai	62
49 ~ Dengyo takes T’ien T’ai’s doctrines to Japan	63
50 MY FEAR OF THE FUTURE DISMANTLED	64
51 What’s on the Gohonzon?	66
52 Receiving Gohonzon	66
53 The Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land	68
54 The Eight Winds	70
55 Sex, Sexuality and Gender II	71

56	The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra – victory through faith	72
57	The importance of dialogue	73
58	Can I change someone’s karma by chanting for them?	74
59	The practice of respecting each other	75
60	OVERCOMING DOUBTS & HESITATION	76
61	Birth, aging, sickness and death are nothing to fear	77
62	Ichinen Sanzen – The heart is like a skilled painter	78
63	Using our karma to open up the future	80
64	The essence of everything is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo	81
65	Behaving humanely towards all	82
66	Freeing ourselves from the sufferings of birth and death	83
67	Can my family and close friends benefit from my practice?	84
68	Life and Death	85
69	~ Nichiren Daishonin passes away	86
70	SEARCHING FOR MY OWN TRUE STRENGTH	88
71	We win when the Gohonzon is central to our lives.	90
72	Ichinen – our fundamental attitude to life	92
73	The solution lies within – the spirit of Human Revolution	93
74	~ From Nichiren till the 20th century	94
75	~ Makiguchi founds the Soka Gakkai	95

76 ~ Toda's experiences in prison	97
77 ~ The Soka Gakkai: Toda becomes president	98
78 Chanting – Fuelling the engines of our lives	99
79 Faith manifests itself in daily life	99
80 THE SUN RISING OVER SOUTH AFRICA	100
81 Those who chant the daimoku <i>are</i> the Treasure Tower	105
82 ~ President Ikeda and the SGI	106
83 ~ The SGI is expelled by Nichiren Shoshu	108
84 Hon'nin myo – Starting afresh right now	110
85 How to become a Buddha	111
86 Take another step forward, even when it's hard	113
87 Treasuring Diversity	114
88 Buddhism is win or lose	116
89 Our lives permeate and contain the universe	117
90 UNDERSTANDING THE GREATNESS OF THE PEOPLE	118
91 Ten Worlds I – Buddhahood in a Moment	122
92 The Ten Worlds II – Breaking Free	123
93 The Ten Worlds III – Striving Ever Higher	125
94 Challenging Fundamental Darkness	126
95 Buddhist unity II	127

96 Buddhist unity III	128
97 Buddhist unity IV	129
98 Why recite the Expedient Means Chapter in Gongyo?	130
99 Why recite the Life Span Chapter of the Lotus Sutra?	131
100 The Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land II	132
101 The Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land III	133
102 The Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land IV	135
103 What happens when a Buddhist becomes ill?	136
104 Crossing the sea of suffering	137
105 Liberating ourselves from the shackles of our past	138
106 We common mortals are Buddhas	139
107 Limitless self-improvement	141
108 Do we have to understand Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?	141
109 Power of the words ‘Nam-myoho-renge-kyo’	142
110 The Ten Worlds – All people can become Buddhas	144
111 Attaining enlightenment in this lifetime	146
112 Humanism and the Buddha	148
113 Ichinen Sanzen – The heart is like a skilled painter	149
114 Who are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth?	152
115 Ichinen – What is at the centre of our lives?	154

INTRODUCTION

WELCOME to the study of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Perhaps this will turn out to be a lifelong adventure for you.

When you have finished reading this, you should have learnt the basics of the Daishonin's philosophy, and be well equipped for attending Buddhist study lectures and for further reading elsewhere.

While you may find yourself happily browsing, this book is designed to be read one day at a time.

Perhaps you are new to the practice of Buddhism. If so, reading this every day while regularly chanting and meeting with fellow Buddhists will certainly have an effect on your life. For you are accessing the wisdom and life force of the Buddha that has always resided within your life.

Truly studying Buddhism means "reading with our lives". That is, not just absorbing facts and quotes with our heads, but following the guidance we find in the Goshō and in the writings of Daisaku Ikeda, and with humility making it part of our lives.

Doing this sometimes requires great courage. But the benefits of doing so are as great.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

Nichiren Buddhism, as practised in the Soka Gakkai International (see the Glossary, and day 16), is based firmly on the Goshō.¹ That is, the writings and letters of Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1283). Nichiren Daishonin, in turn, based his teachings on those of Shakyamuni (Gautama) Buddha, particularly those teachings in the Lotus Sutra.

Thus, studying the Goshō is fundamental to Buddhist study, and this is why each day's study material in First Steps begins with a quote from the Goshō.

A great many Goshō are letters written by Nichiren Daishonin to his followers, who were mostly very ordinary people, in order to encourage them. When we read a Goshō quote, we are listening in as the Daishonin guides his first disciples towards happiness and wisdom.

¹Goshō is a Japanese word meaning "writings worthy of great respect".

Much of the other material in this book is taken from the writings and speeches of Daisaku Ikeda, the honorary life president of the SGI and an internationally recognised scholar of Buddhism.

His many years of practice and of encouraging others in their practice, as well as his activities for peace make him, many SGI members feel, the person most qualified to interpret and explain the significance of the Daishonin's Buddhism in the 21st century.

There are three kinds of content in this book, each marked slightly differently:

- Most sections describe Buddhist concepts.
- Sections marked with a tilde ~ outline the history of Buddhism and the SGI.
- Sections written in SMALL CAPS in the table of contents, and marked "experience" in the text are personal accounts of practising Buddhism written by members of SGI South Africa.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

Respect for life. Nichiren Daishonin based his teaching on the Lotus Sutra, which rests on a few essential points, among them that:

- All life has and can, given the right conditions, manifest the Buddha nature
- Therefore, all life is incredibly precious . . .
- And all human and sentient beings, *regardless of social status, gender or other socially imposed divisions*, are equally worthy of respect

So the Daishonin writes that, "Life is the most precious of all treasures. Even one extra day of life is worth more than ten million ryo of gold."² Everything that he taught, therefore, should be considered in this context.

²WND I, 954.

For example, the concept of kosen-rufu (see page 13), literally translated, means “to widely declare and spread”. This could be interpreted as a call for a world in which Nichiren Buddhism is the only religion. But seen in the light of the principle of respect for all life, kosen-rufu becomes the great goal of a world in which all beings are equally respected; and in which human rights are for everyone, and not the preserve of the white, the wealthy and the powerful. That which should be “widely declared and spread” is not a single religion, but a single view on the value of life.

Buddhism and the concept of God. There are many references to gods in Buddhist texts and the writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

It must be remembered that gods, demons and other supernatural beings were part of the mythological worlds of ancient India and mediæval Japan.

Table 1: Clarifying Buddhism’s view on “God”

Buddhism	A simplistic view of God
There is no supernatural being who interferes in human affairs.	God is an all-seeing, all-knowing entity who can take action in the world.
Prayer developing our own strength, courage, wisdom, compassion and happiness is Buddhahood.	Prayer honours God, or calls on ‘him’ to grant favours or end suffering.
“My life is my responsibility and I decide my destiny.”	“I am in the grip of forces greater than myself: ‘It’s in God’s hands.’”
Evil is human destruction; that which divides people or disregards their humanity.	Evil is inspired by the devil, a wicked being.

So, references to gods were used by the Buddha and by Nichiren as metaphors to explain Buddhist concepts.

In the 21st century, in contrast, we draw many metaphors for how our world works from science, machines and computers. An example is how the human brain is often compared with a computer.

It could be argued that one great source of human confusion is getting reality mixed up with the metaphors we use to explain it.

As modern Buddhists, we do not believe in gods or devils in the sense of conscious beings who take action and interfere in our lives. (Buddhist philosophy is clear that to take action in the physical realm, you need to have a body.)

Of course, many people who believe in God see it not as a person but as a universal and positive force within life. This concept is close to our Buddhist concept of the Mystic Law.

THE SGI CHARTER

WE, THE CONSTITUENT organizations and members of the Soka Gakkai International, embrace the fundamental aim and mission of contributing to peace, culture and education based on the philosophy and ideals of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

We recognize that at no other time in history has humankind experienced such an intense juxtaposition of war and peace, discrimination and equality, poverty and abundance as in the twentieth century; that the development of increasingly sophisticated military technology, exemplified by nuclear weapons, has created a situation where the very survival of the human species hangs in the balance; that the reality of violent ethnic and religious discrimination presents an unending cycle of conflict; that humanity's egoism and intemperance have engendered global problems, including degradation of the natural environment and widening economic chasms between developed and developing nations, with serious repercussions for humankind's collective future.

We believe that Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, a humanistic philosophy of infinite respect for the sanctity of life and all-encompassing compassion, enables individuals to cultivate and bring forth their inherent wisdom and, nurturing the creativity of the human spirit, to surmount the difficulties and crises facing humankind and

realize a society of peaceful and prosperous coexistence.

We therefore, being determined to raise high the banner of world citizenship, the spirit of tolerance, and respect for human rights based on the humanistic spirit of Buddhism, and to challenge the global issues that face humankind through dialogue and practical efforts based on a steadfast commitment to non-violence, hereby adopt this Charter, affirming the following purposes and principles:

1. SGI shall contribute to peace, culture and education for the happiness and welfare of all humanity based on Buddhist respect for the sanctity of life.
2. SGI, based on the ideal of world citizenship, shall safeguard fundamental human rights and not discriminate against any individual on any grounds.
3. SGI shall respect and protect the freedom of religion and religious expression.
4. SGI shall promote an understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism through grass-roots exchange, thereby contributing to individual happiness.
5. SGI shall, through its constituent organizations, encourage its members to contribute toward the prosperity of their respective societies as good citizens.
6. SGI shall respect the independence and autonomy of its constituent organizations in accordance with the conditions prevailing in each country.
7. SGI shall, based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect other religions, engage in dialogue and work together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity.
8. SGI shall respect cultural diversity and promote cultural exchange, thereby creating an international society of mutual understanding and harmony.

9. SGI shall promote, based on the Buddhist ideal of symbiosis, the protection of nature and environment.
10. SGI shall contribute to the promotion of education, in the pursuit of truth as well as development of scholarship, to enable all people to cultivate their characters and enjoy fulfilling and happy lives.

GLOSSARY OF NAMES AND TERMS

Boddhisattva – One who wishes to achieve Buddhahood, and who works towards this goal through altruistic (caring) actions.

Buddha – An ordinary person who is awakened to their own Buddhahood, and who works always to expand their wisdom and compassion by helping others to do the same. This leads to indestructible happiness.

Buddhahood – Determining and acting to develop our wisdom, courage and compassion, increasing our understanding of the nature of life. Achieving Buddhahood is a constant state of action. Even Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin had to work hard to maintain their state of enlightenment. It is the same with us – realising Buddhahood IS daily practice.

Daimoku – The phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Gohonzon – The scroll representing our Buddhahood, to which we chant. It represents our highest life state and great potential as human beings.

Gosho – The writings of Nichiren Daishonin, compiled in English in a single volume titled *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin (WND I)*.

Guidance – Encouragement or advice from a Buddhist member or leader whom we trust. SGI members seek guidance when facing particular difficulties, or sometimes just because they wish to develop faster!

Ikeda, Daisaku – Honorary president of the SGI, Mr Ikeda is a great scholar of Buddhism, a writer, poet and peace activist. He is often referred to as “Sensei”, a Japanese word meaning teacher. Many SGI members consider him their mentor in life and faith.

Karma – The combined effect of our past thoughts, words and ac-

tions, or our lives as they are.

Kosen-rufu – Spreading Buddhism to secure world peace; a peace realised not through all becoming Buddhists, but through Buddhists’ “ceaseless efforts to enhance the value of human dignity, to awaken all people to a sense of their limitless worth and potential”.

Lotus Sutra – “Myoho-rence-kyo”, Shakyamuni’s teaching in which he revealed the ultimate truth of life, and which Nichiren Daishonin used as the basis of his teachings. Tradition has it he taught this sutra during the last eight years of his life, after 42 years of preaching preparatory teachings.

Makiguchi, Tsunesaburo – The Japanese educator and philosopher (1871-1944) whose discovery of Nichiren Buddhism in 1920 led to his founding the Soka Gakkai Buddhist lay society with Josei Toda in 1930. Arrested with Toda for holding to his faith, Makiguchi died in prison.

Nam-myoho-rence-kyo – In the practice established by Nichiren Daishonin, this is the phrase chanted by members of SGI. It can be translated very roughly as, “I embrace the Mystic Law of profound cause and effect which pervades the entire universe”.

Nichiren Daishonin – The Japanese Buddha who lived in the 13th century and established a form of Buddhism for all people and all time, and whose teachings are the foundation of the SGI.

Soka Gakkai – Literally, the “value-creating society”, the Nichiren Buddhist lay society first formed in Japan in 1930 by Makiguchi, and re-built after the second World War by Josei Toda. The Japanese lay Buddhist organisation, as distinct from the many national lay organisations constituting SGI.

SGI – Soka Gakkai International. The leading international organisation for those practising the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, and through which we work for peace, particularly through culture and education. Formed by President Ikeda in 1975, SGI is an affiliation between SGI organisations in 190 countries and territories around the world.

Shakubuku – Introducing others to Buddhism.

Shakyamuni – The Buddha who lived in India 2 500 years ago and whose teachings established all forms of Buddhism.

Three practices – Faith, study and teaching others. The three fundamental practices of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, which SGI members strive to do each day.

Toda, Josei – The second president (1900-58) and founder of the modern Soka Gakkai. Toda's enlightenment in prison in WWII helped him lead the Soka Gakkai to a membership of 750 000 families before his death. His mentor was Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and his leading disciple is Daisaku Ikeda.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS

Confirming our Path – SGI-USA Temple Issue Committee. 1999. *Confirming our Path of Faith – Temple Issue Handbook*. SGI-USA.
Causton, Richard. 1995. *The Buddha in Daily Life*. London: Rider (Ebury Press, Random House).

DI – Daisaku Ikeda.

Hochswender, Woody, Greg Martin & Ted Morino. 2001. *The Buddha in your Mirror*. Middleway Press and SGI-USA.

Ikeda, Daisaku. *Selected Lectures on the Gosho* 1, available from www.sgi-usa.org.

The Journey Begins – SGI-USA. 2004. *The Journey Begins*. World Tribune Press.

Lotus Sutra – Burton Watson (trans). 1993. *The Lotus Sutra*. New York: Columbia University Press.

NHR – Daisaku Ikeda. 1996 (ongoing). *The New Human Revolution* (Multi-volume series, still being written.) Soka Gakkai International.

RC – Richard Causton.

Resource Guide – SGI-USA. [undated] *The Soka Gakkai International: Religious Roots, Early History and Contemporary Development*, available at www.sgi-usa.org/buddhism/resourceguide/.

SGI-USA. 1998. *The Winning Life*. World Tribune Press.

Wickramasinghe, Chandra and Daisaku Ikeda. 1998. *Space and Eternal Life: A Dialogue on the Concept of Karma and Rebirth*. Journeyman Press and Soka Gakkai.

UKE – *UK Express*. SGI-UK. Taplow, Maidenhead, UK. (The mon-

thly journal of SGI-UK, now called *Art of Living*.)

Way of Youth, The – Daisaku Ikeda. 2000. *The Way of Youth*. Santa Monica: Middleway Press.

WLS – Daisaku Ikeda and others. *Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra: A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century*. Tokyo: SGI.

WND I – The Goshō Translation Committee. *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. Soka Gakkai, ongoing.

WNDW – Daisaku Ikeda and others. *The World of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings: A Discussion on Humanistic Religion*. Soka Gakkai.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Being a compilation, this volume's existence is of course only possible because of the incredible efforts of President Ikeda, the translators of the Goshō, and the many other members, particularly in the UK and US, whose devoted efforts to spread an understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism have helped inspire those of us practising in South Africa to prepare this text. We are very grateful to you all.

Typeset with L^AT_EX and TeXShop.

Please report typos etc to
David Le Page at david.lepage@gmail.com.

1 100 DAYS OF STUDY

Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase.³ – Nichiren Daishonin, *WND I*, 386

SOME Goshō, of course, are very doctrinal and complex. But we do not necessarily have to understand all of the Daishonin's writings. The important thing is to have a keen desire to read the Goshō and to expose our lives, even for just a short time each day, to Nichiren Daishonin's spirit. Having such a seeking mind enables us to securely anchor our lives in the orbit of true happiness, in the path of attaining Buddhahood. – Daisaku Ikeda, *Learning from the Goshō*, 7

LET'S READ the Goshō regularly. Even just a little is fine. Even a single sentence.⁴ Just opening the Goshō is a start. At any rate, let's strive to read the Daishonin's writings. It's important to have the spirit to study the Goshō, to open up the Goshō. Even if you forget what you've read, something profound will have been engraved in the depths of your life. – Daisaku Ikeda, *Faith into Action*, 168

2 DISCUSSION MEETINGS

All my disciples and followers should read and listen to this letter. Those who are serious in their resolve should discuss it with one another. – The Votary of the Lotus Sutra: *WND I*, 449
Although I am neither Shakyamuni Buddha nor the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, because each day I read the Lotus Sutra day and

³Chanting, studying Buddhism and teaching others: "the three practices".

⁴This is the logic of this study compilation; each day begins with a Goshō quote.

night and discuss Great Concentration and Insight morning and evening, this place is like the pure land of Eagle Peak and in no way different from Mount T'ien-t'ai. – Reply to the Wife of Matsuno: *WND I*, 981

As a result, this year we have been able to support over a hundred men at this mountain dwelling, and they are able to read and recite the Lotus Sutra and discuss its doctrines all day long. – King Rinda: *WND I*, 990

Therefore, I want people with seeking minds to meet and read this letter together for encouragement. – Letter from Sado: *WND I*, 306

THE Soka Gakkai's first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, initiated the tradition of discussion meetings⁵ in the 1930s. Rather than merely lecturing on difficult theories or concepts, he tried to communicate the greatness of Nichiren Buddhism by having members share their experiences of faith. He often traveled long distances just to attend discussion meetings and encourage each person there that they could become happy through faith.

The second president, Josei Toda, later stated: “You should come home from a discussion meeting feeling happy and inspired from sharing sincere conversation with fellow members, even if only one person or two. This is the kind of discussion meeting you should strive to hold—even if there is only one person who will listen to what you have to say. Just meeting with that one person is important.” Of course, the idea of individual believers encouraging one another stems from Nichiren Daishonin's teachings (see Goshō quote above).

INTELLECTUAL understanding of Nichiren Buddhism alone is not enough to propel our practice forward. Wonderful concepts can stimulate our minds, but it is the sincerity of another that can move our hearts. When both our minds and our hearts are engaged, we will feel motivated to take action. Sharing our experiences and realizations at discussion meetings—and listening to others do the same—helps us

⁵Other meetings can be larger, or noisier! But our monthly discussion meetings are always the most important.

strengthen our resolve to chant and work harder for our dreams and goals.

At the same time, as we encourage others who are going through hard times, we actually find ourselves encouraged and can awaken to a sense of mission to spread this Buddhism. With laughter, moving testimonies and stimulating perspectives on Buddhism, our meetings help us to change fear into courage and inertia into action. – *The Journey Begins*, 23

3 TUSSELS, TROUBLES & DOUBTS

There is definitely something extraordinary in the ebb and flow of the tide, the rising and setting of the moon, and the way in which summer, autumn, winter and spring give way to each other. Something uncommon also occurs when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood. At such a time, the three obstacles and four devils⁶ will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish retreat. – *WND I*, 1113.

Three Obstacles (problems in our environments). The obstacle of earthly desires — desires of others that stimulate our own greed, anger and foolishness. The obstacle of karma — opposition from one's partner or children. The obstacle of retribution — opposition from one's superiors, including one's parents.

Four Devils (our own prejudices or weaknesses). The devil from the three poisons — expressed as wrong thinking, arising from shallow wisdom and delusion. The devil arising from the five components — the obstacle of sickness which can physically hinder practice, and causes doubt. The devil of death — fear of one's one death or doubts caused by the untimely death of a fellow believer. The devil king of the sixth heaven — expressed as both the inherent negativity of life,

⁶You may sometimes hear the Three Obstacles and Four Devils referred to by their Japanese name, *sansho shima*.

and as oppression by those in power; the most powerful of all the three obstacles and four devils.

BROADLY speaking, the three obstacles are external impediments (blocks) to our practice. The four devils are internal hindrances (blocks) that seek to weaken and destroy our faith. The internal and external act in concert however. For example, opposition from one's partner (husband or wife) is external, but it arises from the karma within one's own life. At the same time, giving in to such opposition out of fear or the desire to please is also internal, the "devil" arising from the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness . . .

But however strong these "obstacles" and "devils" might appear, once we recognise them for what they are we can definitely overcome them, and actually turn them into a springboard for our growth. As Nichiren Daishonin warns, "If you do not know your enemies, they will deceive you (*WND I*, 664)." – *Art of Living*, November 2004

IN REFERRING TO his efforts to propagate this Buddhism, the Daishonin often referred to it as "a battle", or said that Buddhism was "win or lose". Of course, by the word "battle", he did not mean military-style combat but rather a battle within one's own life — a battle over whether humanity will guide itself to the correct Law or give in to distorted views.

In this respect, SGI President Ikeda once stated: "Devils in Buddhism indicates *those functions that obstruct Buddhist faith and practice or the movement of kosen-rufu*. In a sense, Buddhism may be called a battle between the Buddha nature and life's devilish functions. It is a battle to determine whether one will manifest the state of Buddhahood or fall into the three evil paths of Hell, Hunger and Animality."

He also stated: "When one's ichinen [or will] in the depths of one's life fuses with the Gohonzon, it manifests the essential nature of enlightenment. However, if one is deceived by bad friends or evil influences, the ichinen of enlightenment will give way to that of delusion, one's faith will be diminished or even injured, and he or she can be plunged into unhappiness."

Paradoxical as it may seem, the function of such devils becomes

manifest when the votaries of the Lotus Sutra exert themselves in pursuing altruistic goals. Progress emits great rays of hope, clearly illuminating the evil in one's environment. The contrast between good and evil sharpens when light brightens and shadows darken.

For our own sake, we need to develop a correct perspective on life that will enable us to identify evil in any form. We need to get into a correct orbit of life for our happiness. For the sake of others, taking action to help others reveal their Buddha nature can drive out the devilish functions that warp human hearts and minds. – *Ted Morino, SGI-USA study department*

4 SEEKING GOOD FRIENDS

You have associated with a friend in the orchid room and have become as straight as mugwort growing among hemp. – On Establishing the Correct Teaching: *WND I*, 23

Moreover, in this evil latter age, evil companions are more numerous than the dust particles that comprise the land, while good friends are fewer than the specks of dirt one can pile on a fingernail. – Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain: *WND I*, 598

WE cannot practice Nichiren Buddhism alone. One of Shakyamuni Buddha's disciples once asked him: "Having good friends and practicing among them would be halfway to the mastery of the Buddha's Way, would it not?" Shakyamuni replied: "Having good friends does not constitute the midpoint to the Buddha's Way. Rather, it constitutes all of the Buddha's Way."

In Buddhism "good friends" in faith are people who lead you to and help you practice Buddhism correctly for the maximum benefit. Such good friends are important, Buddhism teaches, because in the course of our practice, obstacles and doubts will inevitably arise causing us, perhaps, to lose our original determination. Good friends can give us perspective, keep us focused on our goals and encourage

us along the way of practice. Without such good friends, it would be difficult if not impossible to continue.

“The best way to attain Buddhahood,” writes Nichiren Daishonin, “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” (*WND I*, 598). Fortunately for us, the SGI is a gathering of such good friends in faith. We support one another, pray together and offer timely encouragement and guidance. Staying in contact with other SGI members, especially when just starting out, is to our ultimate benefit. In fact, the path to happiness lies in seeking good friends and striving to become good friends ourselves. – *The Journey Begins*, 7-8

5 NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO I

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is only one phrase or verse, but it is no ordinary phrase, for it is the essence of the entire sutra. – The One Essential Phrase: *WND I*, 922

The lotus plant resembles the principle of Myoho-renge in that it simultaneously contains both cause [blossom] and effect [seed]. – The Entity of the Mystic Law: *WND I*, 422

WHEN we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with deep faith, we call forth the power to be able to develop a noble life-condition and to respect and cherish one another with a mind as vast as the sky and sea. – *DI*, quoted in *The Buddha in Daily Life*

THE BUDDHISM OF Nichiren Daishonin reveals the existence of a universal law, the essence of all things. This law is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Superficially, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo could be translated as: “I devote myself to the Mystic Law of cause and effect through sound” . . . The complete meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo cannot truly be understood intellectually.

Myoho-renge-kyo is the title, in Chinese, of the Lotus Sutra. It is in this Sutra that Shakyamuni, the first historically recorded Buddha,

revealed the extraordinary truth that all beings have equal potential to attain enlightenment in their present form. That all of us, in fact, already possess the Buddha nature. Unfortunately we are, as imperfect human beings, unaware of this truth and it remained a marvellous theory until the advent of Nichiren Daishonin. – *Jiggy Mazzarella, UKE Aug 1996, 10*

6 ~ NICHIREN DAISHONIN

How much more true this is of Nichiren, who in this life was born poor and lowly to a chandala⁷ family. – Letter from Sado: *WND* /: 303

Nichiren Daishonin was born on February 16, 1222, in a small fishing village named Kominato. His parents sent him at the age of 12 to a local temple to begin his formal education. There he perfected his skills in reading and writing in both Japanese and Chinese, the latter being the language of official and scholarly communication at the time.

The temple where he studied, Seicho-ji, belonged to the Tendai school which nominally adhered to the teachings handed down from the T'ien-t'ai school in China. In fact, the T'ien-t'ai teachings had become mixed with rituals from other religious schools, a syncretism typical of Japanese Buddhism in the thirteenth century. Nichiren was disturbed by this confusion of doctrines and decided at age 16 to continue his religious studies rather than return to secular life.

Nichiren later recounted that he had prayed to the Bodhisattva Space Treasury to become the wisest person in Japan and had been presented with “a great jewel as brilliant as the morning star.”

He set out in 1239 to find documentary confirmation of his understanding at the centers of Buddhist learning elsewhere in Japan. During the succeeding fourteen years that he spent studying Buddhist texts and doctrine, he became increasingly critical of the various

⁷Lower caste, poor or working class.

Buddhist schools, finally becoming convinced that the Lotus Sutra (Hokekyo in Japanese) was the only teaching that fully expressed the truth to which he had been awakened. – *Resource Guide*

NICHIREN DAISHONIN brought [the Lotus Sutra] out of the realm of theoretical contemplation in an actual experiential practice when he first chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (Devotion to the Mystic Law) on April 28, 1253, and later inscribed the Gohonzon (the physical object of devotion for all humanity). – *The Winning Life, 36*

7 ~ NICHIREN'S LIFE AND TEACHING

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. But instead they have persecuted me in various ways and finally had me banished to this island. – The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life: *WND I, 217*

NICHIREN returned to Seicho-ji in 1253 [after 14 years of intense study at temples around Japan] and, shortly afterward, very early in the morning of the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month, chanted the daimoku — the invocation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo — for the first time, proclaiming that this phrase embodied the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, that is, the ultimate truth of all phenomena. – *Resource Guide*

After first preaching Nam-myoho-renge-ko, Nichiren dedicated his life to sharing his realization, despite facing numerous persecutions for preaching what was considered a subversive doctrine. By declaring that embracing this Law had the power to allow all individuals to attain enlightenment, the Daishonin disturbed the ruling class of politicians and priests who adhered to other forms of Buddhism. Nonetheless, he gained a loyal following of believers. He especially embraced ordinary people from all walks of life. – *The Winning Life, 37*

8 THE POWER OF FAITH

But your faith alone will determine all these things. – Reply to Kyo'o: *WND I*, 412

To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who uphold this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties. – The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith: *WND I*, 471

Be resolved to summon forth the great power of faith, and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with the prayer that your faith will be steadfast and correct at the moment of death. Never seek any other way to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death, and manifest it in your life. Only then will you realize that earthly desires are enlightenment, and that the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana. Even embracing the Lotus Sutra would be useless without the heritage of faith. – The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life: *WND I*, 218

A SINGLE arrow, shot by a great archer, will unerringly hit the mark. Similarly, a strong and deep prayer offered with unwavering *ichinen*, or concentration of mind, will in accordance with the principle that a single life moment contains three thousand realms, move the entire universe. – *DI, SGI Guidance Booklet 4, August 1993*

IN BUDDHISM, faith means a pure heart, a flexible spirit and an open mind. Faith is the function of human life to dispel the dark clouds of doubt, anxiety and regret and sincerely open and direct one's heart toward something great. Faith might also be characterised as the power that enables the microcosm of the self to sense the universal macrocosm. – *DI, Lectures on the Lotus Sutra 4(1), 177*

FAITH IS inextinguishable hope . . . the basis of this practice is prayer. Through prayer, hope turns to confidence. To offer prayers is to conduct a dialogue, an exchange with the universe. When we pray we embrace the universe with our lives, or *ichinen*. Prayer is not feeble consolation. It is powerful, unyielding conviction – *DI, Lecture on the One Essential Phrase: UKE September 96, 24)*

9 ~ WHO WAS SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA?

Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment countless eons ago, the Lotus Sutra which leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from each other. – Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life: *WND I*, 216

Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, was born in the kalpa of continuance, in the ninth period of decrease, when the span of human life measured a hundred years. He was the grandson of King Simhahanu and the son and heir of King Shuddhodana. As a boy he was known as Crown Prince Siddhartha, or the Bodhisattva⁸ All Goals Achieved. – The Opening of the Eyes I: *WND I*, 233

When Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings in the threefold world, was nineteen years old, he left the city of Gaya and went into retreat on Mount Dandaka, where he carried out various difficult and painful austerities. – Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man I: *WND I*, 106

MOST contemporary scholars believe Shakyamuni lived around the fourth to fifth centuries BCE. Nevertheless, many differing opinions still exist on this point today.

What is known, however, is that Shakyamuni was born as a prince of the Shakyas, in the foothills of the Himalayas. His family name was Gautama. Later, when he attained enlightenment, his followers came to call him Gautama Buddha or Shakyamuni—the latter meaning “Sage of the Shakyas”.

He was an extraordinarily sensitive youth, and eventually began to suffer from deep spiritual anguish. Often he would walk by the pond in the palace gardens immersed in deep philosophical thought.

“No matter how young and healthy we may be,” he thought, “old age, sickness and death will inevitably overtake us. This is a destiny none of us can avoid.”

⁸A being who carries out altruistic, or caring, practices, to attain Buddhahood.

Buddhist tradition holds that a series of incidents known as “the four meetings” motivated Shakyamuni’s decision to renounce secular life.

Venturing outside the eastern gate of the palace on a pleasure outing one day, he encountered an old man; leaving from the southern gate on another occasion, he saw a sick person; and passing through the western gate yet another time, he came across a corpse.

Then one day, he left through the northern gate, where he chanced upon a passing ascetic.⁹ This encounter struck a deep chord in him; he resolved to renounce his princely title and go out into the world in search of enlightenment. – *NHR3, 142-5*

10 THE IMAGE IN THE MIRROR

BOWING TO ME

EXPERIENCE:–

SATOKO MAHLANGU, JOHANNESBURG

I WOULD LIKE to share with you my experience about broadening my mental capacity as a human being. This process is called Human Revolution, the ultimate purpose of practising Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

I did not have a very happy childhood. I grew up in Japan under the strict control of my parents, who treated me as if I was just their commodity. They considered my “treasures”, such as my drawings on pieces of paper and old toys that I had strong attachment to as “rubbish”, and would throw them away at their discretion. If I spoke back, I was beaten up or kicked, or both. When they did not give me a hiding, they would instead verbally abuse me, calling me “Useless” or “Nothing”. The thing that depressed me the most was that they often spoke to me in a patronizing manner—“Satoko, who provides you with food and clothes? Who pays the school fees for you? We do, don’t we? That is why you must obey our orders.”

In retrospect, I do not think my mentality was normal, as I was often preoccupied with negative thoughts. I would always be thinking

⁹An ascetic rejects material comforts to gain spiritual fulfilment.

about what would be the best way to commit suicide, or what cursing words I should leave in my suicide note to my parents. Their repeated calling me “useless” or “nothing” ingrained in my mind and as a result I came to believe it in a very natural way. At the same time, I was constantly filled with pent-up anger, the kind of anger that was never allowed to be vented.

I became a SGI Buddhist at the age of twenty-one. The person who introduced me to the practice told me that if I worked hard on something when practising Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, my effort would be paid off 100% or even more. His words struck home as I had been making desperate efforts to reform my mentality.

Before long, I had to face ferocious opposition from my parents. At that time I stayed with them in their house. As soon as they found out that I had joined the Soka-Gakkai, they treated me as if I had joined a criminal organisation. Their abusive words rained down on me day after day, even at the dinner table, which totally drained me and simultaneously I developed more aversion to them.

I must emphasize the two elements that helped me to survive this situation. The first was studying the Goshō. As my parents always watched me closely, I had no chance to attend even a single Soka Gakkai meeting. To continue the practice, I “devoured” many Goshō passages. The following one especially supported me:

In order to expiate the sin of your past slanders, you are opposed by your parents, who hold mistaken views . . . Never doubt that you slandered the correct teaching in the past. If you have doubt about this, you will be unable to withstand the minor sufferings of this life. Then you may give in to your father’s opposition and desert the Lotus Sutra against your will. Remember that, if this happens, not only will you fall into hell, but also your precious parents will fall into the great Avichi hell, causing all of you indescribable grief. The essential thing is a great resolve to attain the way. – Letter to the Brothers: *WND I*, 497

I used to read this Goshō passage in tears. I never forget Goshō passages that I learnt with such intensity.

The second, and the most important thing was the support that I received from fellow members. I cannot complete my experience without mentioning them. As President Ikeda always emphasizes, the life of SGI lies in intensive care for each individual member; I received wholehearted support from many members in the area I stayed in. They made great efforts to encourage me in spite of being turned away by my parents whenever they tried to visit me.

One day, I had an opportunity to receive guidance from a senior woman member. She told me that I should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for my parents' happiness, as I should repay the debt of gratitude to them. In disbelief of her guidance, I just kept quiet. I thought that it would be the same as practising hypocrisy and I did not want to lie to myself. I could not help but hate my parents.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this experience, the true purpose of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is to broaden your mental capacity as a human being. To this end, firstly, you have to discover much more about who you are, and your constant daily chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo definitely works on this.

In those days I was arrogant and considered myself to be so clever that I knew everything about myself. Although I did not chant for my parents, I was vigorously chanting on average, two hours every day. Within several years after receiving this specific guidance, I discovered more about myself, and I reached the point where I realised that my mentality was actually very similar to my parents! This was the last thing I could possibly accept in my life. I also experienced difficulties in relationship with others because of my mentality. I hardly had a friend. My parents had no friends either. For the first time in my life I felt compassion for them welling up from the depth of my heart. It was truly a revolutionary event for me.

A "miracle" ensued. However, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism does not view this phenomenon as a miracle. According to Nichiren's Buddhism, this "miracle" was the result (effect) of my cause made by years of persistent, strong chanting. I was determined to transform the difficulties I was experiencing. My parents' attitude towards me began to soften. They stopped complaining about my chanting and allowed me to go to Soka Gakkai meetings. An intense but indescrib-

able sensation, which might be called “gratitude”, surged up inside me, as I realised that I had understood the specific Goshō passage about Bodhisattva Never Disparaging with my heart and soul: “When you bow to a mirror, your image in the mirror will also bow to you.”

11 THE LOTUS SUTRA

The heart of the Lotus Sutra is the revelation that one may attain supreme enlightenment in one’s present form without altering one’s status as an ordinary person. – Reply to Hakiri Saburo: *WND I*, 410

The Lotus Sutra is the teaching that enables all living beings to attain the Buddha way. – Questions and Answers about Embracing the Lotus Sutra: *WND I*, 59

... There are many other analogies ... Among them is that of a traveller who finds a ship when he wishes to make a crossing. The meaning of this analogy is that, in the sea of the sufferings of birth and death, the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra are like rafts or small boats. Although they can carry people from one shore in the realm of birth and death to another shore in that same realm, they are incapable of carrying them across the sea of birth and death to the distant shore of Perfect Bliss. – The Essence of the Medicine King Chapter: *WND I*, 95

DURING THE final eight years of his life, [Shakyamuni] expounded his ultimate teachings, which were later compiled as the Lotus Sutra.¹⁰ The Lotus Sutra is unique among the teachings of Buddhism, because it affirms that the attainment of enlightenment is possible for all people without distinction of race, gender, social standing or education. Buddhism, as epitomised in the Lotus Sutra, is a powerful, life-affirming, egalitarian and humanistic teaching. – *The Journey Begins*

¹⁰The Buddha’s teachings were passed down orally for several hundred years before being written down. They represent the collective wisdom of those who transmitted them, not necessarily the precise words of Shakyamuni.

NO MATTER HOW stormy our situation, when the sun blazes in the depths of our lives, a clear, bright sky—like the blue sky of May—opens in our hearts. And when we possess in our hearts the four virtues of eternity, happiness, true self and purity, then the land — the place where we are — shines as the land of eternally tranquil light.

While everyone has a sun in his or her heart, all too few are aware it exists. The Lotus Sutra is the scripture that reveals the brilliant sun of Buddhahood inherent in our lives.

“You, yourself, are a Buddha.” “Revere the sun of Buddhahood in your own life.” This is the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the message of the *Hoben* chapter.

Shakyamuni perceived that everyone possesses the Buddhahood that is the same as his. And he made it possible for anyone to advance along the path that led to his enlightenment. Based on the irrefutable reason of the proposition that all human beings are respectable, and that there is no human being who is better than anyone else, Shakyamuni went out among the people and began expounding the Law continuously. – DI, *Lectures on the Hoben and Juryo Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*

12 GONGYO – DAILY REVITALISATION

How much more immeasurable, then, are the blessings to be won by reading or reciting the sutra. – Letter to Horen: *WND I*, 516

Whether you chant the Buddha’s name, recite the sutra, or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits and roots of goodness in your life. – On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: *WND I*, 4

GONGYO¹¹ is a daily activity in which we purify and prime our hearts and minds. It is starting the “engine” for our day’s fresh start . . .

¹¹Literally, “assiduous practice”. Our Liturgy of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism consists of extracts from the 2nd and 16th chapters of the 28-chapter Lotus Sutra.

Gongyo and chanting daimoku represent a ceremony in which our lives commune with the universe. Gongyo is an activity in which, through our faith in the Gohonzon, we vigorously infuse the microcosm of our individual existence with the life force of the macrocosm, of the entire universe. If we do this regularly each morning and evening, our life force — our engine — is strengthened . . .

The Mystic Law, too, is invisible. Nevertheless, it exists without a doubt. Nichiren Daishonin revealed the object of fundamental respect, the Gohonzon, in the form of a mandala so that we could tap and manifest the power of the Mystic Law in our own lives. That is why second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda put it in the following easy-to-understand way, saying: “I apologise for using such a simplistic analogy, but the Gohonzon can be likened to a happiness-manufacturing machine.”

. . . When we rev up the powerful, revitalising engine of Buddhahood, we can break through any impasse and boldly steer a course in the direction of hope and justice. – *DI, The Importance of Gongyo and Daimoku, SGI Newsletter 3435*

WHEN we do gongyo and chant daimoku, we conduct a ceremony in which we praise the Gohonzon and the great Law of Nam-myohorenge-kyo . . . It could be said that gongyo is a paean or a song of the highest and utmost praise for the Buddha and for Nam-myohorenge-kyo, the fundamental law of the universe. At the same time, when we do gongyo, we also praise the eternal life of the universe, and the world of Buddhahood in our own lives. – *DI, Lectures on the Expedient Means and Life Span chapters of the Lotus Sutra I, 21*

13 KOSEN-RUFU

Teaching another something is the same as oiling the wheels of a cart so that they turn even though it is heavy, or as floating a boat on water so that it moves ahead easily. – The Wealthy Man Sudatta: *WND I, 1086*

TO NURTURE and cultivate people's lives with a philosophy of humanism, in the pursuit of lasting peace and happiness, is what it means to implement the Daishonin's teaching of creating a peaceful society based on the tenets of his Buddhism. Herein lies the mission of the Soka Gakkai. – *DI, NHR4, 241*

THE JAPANESE PHRASE *kosen-rufu* expresses a centrally important concept for members of the SGI. It is often used synonymously with world peace, and has been informally defined as “world peace through individual happiness.” More broadly, it could be understood as a vision of social peace brought about by the widespread acceptance of core values such as unfailing respect for the dignity of human life.

The phrase itself is of ancient origin and appears in the 23rd chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which states, “In the fifth five hundred years after my death, accomplish worldwide *kosen-rufu* and never allow its flow to cease.” Here, the phrase *kosen-rufu* is written with four Chinese characters that could be rendered, respectively, as “widely”, “declare”, “flow” and “promulgate”, and in its most literal sense it means the widespread flow and spreading — and application — of the teachings contained in the Lotus Sutra. *Kosen-rufu* implies an approach to Buddhist practice that is deeply engaged with the affairs of society and the world.

The stress placed by Nichiren on *kosen-rufu* typifies his approach to Buddhist practice; that our personal happiness — enlightenment — is inextricably linked with the peace and happiness of our fellow humans and of society as a whole.

In Nichiren's view, enlightenment is not so much a goal or end in itself, as a basis for altruistic action. The life-state of Buddhahood — a condition of limitless vitality, wisdom and compassion — is one which is expressed, *maintained* and strengthened through committed action to contribute to the well-being and happiness of other people.

It is important to clarify what *kosen-rufu* is not. It does *not* mean the conversion of all Earth's inhabitants, without exception, to Nichiren Buddhism.

In our world today, the darkness that most requires dispelling is the entrenched inability to recognize the dignity of life. Ideologies teaching that certain people are without worth, that certain lives are

expendable, undermine the common basis of human dignity. The failure to recognize one's own true potential and worth is always linked with the denial of these qualities in others. Violence has its well-springs in a gnawing lack of self-confidence.

Thus, for the members of the SGI, *kosen-rufu* means *the ceaseless effort to enhance the value of human dignity, to awaken all people to a sense of their limitless worth and potential*. It is for this reason that efforts in the fields of peace, humanitarian aid, educational and cultural exchange are all seen as vital aspects of the movement for *kosen-rufu*. For these promote the values that are integral to human happiness.

Finally, it should be understood that *kosen-rufu* does not represent a static end point. As SGI President Ikeda notes, "Kosen-rufu does not mean the end point or terminus of a flow, but it is the flow itself, the very pulse of living Buddhism within society." – *SGI Quarterly (online)*

I NOW WISH to call out again: "Cause the flame of faith to burn bright in your lives!" For only then is Buddhism truly alive. Buddhism comes down to the human being; it is faith. It is not to be sought anywhere apart from here. As long as the flame of faith burns in the SGI, the sacred enterprise of *kosen-rufu* to lead all people to happiness will continue to advance. How precious is the SGI! How much must we give our lives to protecting this wonderful organization! – *DI, Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra 50*

14 KARMA AND TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

One who climbs a high mountain must eventually descend. One who slights another will in turn be despised. One who deprecates those of handsome appearance will be born ugly. One who robs another of food and clothing is sure to fall into the world of hungry spirits. One who mocks a person who observes the pre-

cepts and is worthy of respect will be born to an impoverished and lowly family. One who slanders a family that embraces the correct teaching will be born to a family that holds erroneous views. One who laughs at those who cherish the precepts faithfully will be born a commoner and meet with persecution from one's sovereign. This is the general law of cause and effect. – Letter from Sado: *WND I*, 305

BUDDHISM, founded on the law of cause and effect, stresses the concept of karma. This principle explains that life at each moment is subject to the cumulative effects of causes made in the past. What we do, what we say, and what we think are all causes. And according to Buddhism, the moment we do something, say something or think something, and effect is registered in the depths of our being.

Then, as our lives meet the right circumstances, the effect becomes apparent. Personality traits are strongly connected to our karma. The good news is that, unlike fate, our karma can be changed by causes we make from this moment forward. In fact, the practice of Buddhism is essentially the practice of continually changing our karma.

Whether we practice Buddhism or not, we can significantly improve our current situation by making a strong determination to make better causes from now on. We need not despair, as all our good causes will bring about, over time, a noticeable improvement in our circumstances. – *DI, The Way of Youth*, 127

15 THE TEN WORLDS

Volume Five of Great Concentration and Insight states: “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.” – The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind: *WND I*, 354

ALTHOUGH OUR LIVES are constantly changing and we experience a range of emotions from moment to moment, Buddhism teaches that our experience of the world can always be understood as one of ten basic states of life. These are called the Ten Worlds, and what follows is a brief impression of the negative and positive aspects of each of these worlds:

1. Hell: – Misery and suffering. Fear, grief and destructive rages or depression. A feeling of being imprisoned by one’s circumstances. + Having experienced hell helps us maintain a desire to better our circumstances. Empathy, understanding the sufferings of others.
2. Hunger: – Being dominated by desires or cravings, both physical and mental. + The driving force to improve a situation. People can hunger, even yearn to see others happy and fight for peace in the world.
3. Animality: – Instinctive behaviour, lacking in reason. Fear of those who seem stronger and bullying of those who seem weaker. The “law of the jungle”. + Protective instincts, for example, that we need more sleep. Preservation of self or others.
4. Anger: – Feeling superior to others and wanting to show it. Aggressiveness. Feeling in conflict with others. The world of self-centredness and ego. + Anger at injustice. The passion to fight authoritarian behaviour.
5. Humanity, or Tranquillity: – Constant inactivity, laziness, passivity. + Being at peace, calm and reasonable. An opportunity to restore one’s energies.
6. Rapture, or Heaven: – Short term gratification when one’s desires have been achieved. Can quickly revert to hell, or hunger. + Temporary joy when desires are fulfilled. Exhilaration at being alive.
7. Learning: + Learning about life and oneself from others and from existing knowledge. – Can lead to self-centredness and

separation from others. In the Lotus Sutra people of Learning and Realization were taught they could only enter the realm of Buddhahood through faith.

8. Realization: + The wisdom or insight where we gain an understanding of an aspect of life from our own observations and experiences. – Can lead to self-centredness and a tendency to use one's intellect, rather than one's wisdom, to solve problems.
9. Bodhisattva: + The word consists of bodhi (enlightenment) and sattva (beings) and means someone who seeks enlightenment, for themselves and others. as shown by eg nurses or a parent's love for a child. – May turn to arrogance if you feel superior to those you are helping. Pouring life-force out towards the lives of others, without paying attention to one's own needs means that one's life will move towards the lower life states.
10. Buddha: An ordinary person awakened to the true nature of life, and experiencing absolute happiness and freedom within the realities of daily life. Indestructible joy, unlimited wisdom, courage, compassion, creativity and life force.

The Buddha state originates from the very depths of life, called the *amala* consciousness, meaning the fundamentally pure life force or consciousness. The function of the Buddha state is to bring out the positive side of the other nine worlds. This principle of the Ten Worlds shows that the Buddha state is a naturally occurring condition of life in every living being.

The purpose of Buddhist practice is to enable us to cause the Buddha state to appear; to have it working strongly in us. In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, then, the Buddha is not some perfect, ideal being, but is rather an ordinary person living in rhythm with the law of the universe, taking wise, courageous and compassionate action for the benefit of others, through the functioning of the nine worlds in daily life. – *SGI-UK Study Department, Introductory Study Programme Materials: The Working of the Ten Worlds. SGI-UK: Version 2.0, July 2004*

16 THE SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL

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 all the ten directions will all become treasure realms, and how could a treasure realm ever suffer harm? – On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: *WND I*, 25

THE SGI'S PEACE activities include its active involvement with the United Nations as a non-governmental organization; annual peace proposals by Ikeda submitted to the UN; peace education programs; inter-religious dialogues; fund-raising efforts in support of the UN's refugee relief and other humanitarian programs; anti-war and anti-nuclear weapon exhibits, petition drives and publications, usually cosponsored with like-minded organizations.

Several affiliated institutions focusing on peace research, peace activities and inter-cultural dialogue have been established. These include the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century,¹² which promotes women's leadership for peace, supports education for global citizenship, and fosters community-building—locally and globally—through dialogue; the Institute of Oriental Philosophy, which works with university researchers on ways to apply Eastern, especially Buddhist philosophical approaches to contemporary problems; and the Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research,¹³ which promotes peace initiatives at national, regional and international levels.

In the cultural arena, the SGI sponsors international friendship exchanges as well as world peace and cultural festivals. In Japan, the Soka Gakkai, under the aegis of the Min-On Concert Association,

¹²www.brc21.org

¹³www.toda.org

regularly sponsors performance tours by world artists. The Tokyo Fuji Art Museum serves a similar function in the art world.

Finally, in the area of education, we come full circle. Makiguchi's thoughts on education are thriving in Japan in the Soka Schools system which extends from kindergarten to university-level education. Soka University of Japan currently has academic exchanges with over 70 colleges and universities around the world. Soka kindergartens have been established in Hong Kong and Singapore. Soka University of America (SUA), an independent institution of higher education, consists of a graduate school in Calabasas, California.

SGI's educational activities focus on global concerns such as ecology and sustainable living, human rights and a culture of peace.

There is a fourth area of activities, though only in Japan: political engagement. From 1955, during Toda's leadership, the Soka Gakkai fielded individual candidates for elective office on both the local and national levels. Later, under Ikeda's leadership, the Komei (literally, "clean government") coalition was organized. It became a full-fledged party, Komeito, in 1964. Given the Soka Gakkai's experience of religious persecution during World War II, Toda and Ikeda saw the need for such a political party to represent the marginalized voices of the general populace and raise the level of discourse in Japan's fledgling, postwar democratic system. Komeito formally separated from the Soka Gakkai in 1970. New Komeito is currently the third leading party in Japan and a member of the coalition government. The Soka Gakkai maintains its right to express an ethical stance on political issues. – *Resource Guide*

17 MASTERING ONE'S MIND

The Buddha wrote that one should become the master of one's mind rather than let one's mind master oneself. – Letter to Gijo-bo: *WND I*, 390

THE key point of this letter [to Gijo-bo] is that what is in our "mind", or at the heart of our lives, is the most important and

decisive thing. “Mind” in this sense doesn’t just mean our conscious mind, it means the spiritual aspect of our lives. Another way of expressing it is our fundamental “attitude”. It’s often easy to see how someone else’s attitude to life causes his or her problems, but it can be incredibly hard to see how our own negative attitude is influencing us.

Our minds are easily swayed by our circumstances, easily influenced by the poisons of anger, greed and stupidity. Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon to enable us to “observe” our minds. By this he didn’t mean just to see what negative attitudes are causing us to suffer, but to understand the reality of *ichinen sanzen* in our lives; to see the Buddha nature within us and make it central to our thoughts, words and deeds . . .

According to President Ikeda:

It is quite easy to forget, or not understand, that the purpose of the practice is to reveal Buddhahood. We think the practice exists to solve our problems or help us to achieve our goals. Actually, it is our Buddhahood that enables us to do both these things. It is our Buddha wisdom, compassion and courage that allows us to live a great life . . .

So revealing our Buddhahood means to change our “minds”, or the state of our lives. It doesn’t mean becoming a special person, or in some way different from how we are. It means to reveal and develop our highest state of life — to have a shining life! – *UKE April 1994, No. 274, 28-29*

18 ~ SHAKYAMUNI SEEKS WISDOM

Thus the Buddha fulfilled his words, “Living beings are numberless. I vow to save them all,”¹⁴ when he declares, “At the start I

¹⁴One of the four universal vows of a bodhisattva.

took a vow, hoping to make all persons equal to me without distinction, and what I long ago hoped for has now been fulfilled.” –
The Opening of the Eyes I: *WND I*, 250

THE hermit-sage Shakyamuni chose as his first teacher had attained, through yogic meditation, the stage known as “the realm where nothing exists” — a state of emptiness in which one is free from all worldly attachments. Under him, Shakyamuni applied himself to practice and in a short time attained the same level as his teacher. However, he felt that the teaching did not provide a fundamental solution to the questions of human life and death.

He sought out another teacher, also a hermit and master of yogic mediation, who through that practice had attained “the realm where there is neither thought nor no thought” — a state where there was no mental activity. Again, Shakyamuni quickly mastered this practice, but it also failed to fulfil his purposed in pursuing a religious life.

It was commonly believed in India in those days that the body was tainted and the spirit alone was pure . . . Shakyamuni thus embarked on ascetic practice. His austerities included engaging in long fasts, lying on a bed of thorns, sleeping on the bones of corpses in the cemetery and eating filth. So punishing were the rigours he inflicted on himself that no one could rival him.

Yet eventually [after several years] he pondered: “Because [this practice] inflicts only pain and suffering, it is a lowly and valueless form of practice.” He decided to abandon this path. His sudden departure took [his fellow ascetics] greatly by surprise.

Having left the woods, Shakyamuni stood at the banks of the Nairanjana River. The sunlight glistened on the leaves of the trees and shimmered like diamonds on the water’s surface.

He made his way unsteadily down to the river to bathe his body. He was dazed from extreme exhaustion, but the water revived him. He washed away the grime of his accumulated austerities so that he might start anew. – *NHR3*, 150-3

19 ~ SHAKYAMUNI UNDER A PIPAL TREE

The votary of the Lotus Sutra is the Thus Come One whose life span is immeasurable; no wonder his practice is hindered, just as the pine trees branches are bent or broken. From now on, always remember the words “This sutra is hard to uphold.” – The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith: *WND I*, 471

As he sat on the river bank [after washing away the grime of his Ascetic austerities], a young girl, called Sujata, appeared at his side and offered him some rice gruel. After his long fast, Shakyamuni gladly accepted the food. Fresh life began to infuse his body.

After resting, he set off in search of a new path that would lead him to enlightenment. Crossing the Nairanjana River, Shakyamuni eventually came upon a large pipal tree. He sat down beneath its branches, crossed his legs and assumed the lotus position.

“I shall remain in this position until I have attained true enlightenment, even if my body withers in the heat as I try,” he vowed,¹⁵ and then gently closed his eyes.

From time to time, the wind rustled through the leaves of the pipal tree, but Shakyamuni, lost in deep inner contemplation, did not stir.

According to Buddhist writings, at this time demons began to tempt him.¹⁶ In one [account], for example, a demon tried to sway Shakyamuni by whispering to him gently, “You’re surely on the verge of death. If you keep on sitting here like this, it will be a miracle if you survive.”

Demons are the workings of earthly desires and illusions; they attempt to unsettle the mind of those who seek the way to true enlightenment. Sometimes demons arise in the form of our attachments to worldly desires, or appear as hunger or sleepiness. At other times, they torture the mind in the form of anxiety, fear and doubt.

¹⁵Vows are very important to Buddhist practice.

¹⁶Just as described on day 3 so the Buddha had to overcome the Three Obstacles and Four Devils in his own life.

More often than not, demons cause people to clutch at some logic that vindicates their weaknesses and emotional needs.

However, Shakyamuni saw these devilish functions for what they were and summoned a powerful life force, sweeping away all the disruptive thoughts that plagued him. In his heart, he cried, “Demons! You may defeat a coward, but the brave will triumph. Rather than living in defeat, I would rather die fighting!” – *NHR3, 153-5*

20 LEARNING WHAT’S RIGHT FOR ME

EXPERIENCE:–

NWABISILE DAKADA, MASIPHUMELELE, CAPE TOWN

MY NAME IS Nwabisile Elvis Dakada.¹⁷ I am 31 years old. I was born and grew up in Lady Frere in Eastern Cape. I lived with my mother’s family because my mother was working in Cape Town and my father was never around. I started herding sheep and goats when I was four years old and only attended school when I was 12 years old. That was normal in my area. I left school when I was in Standard 4 (Grade 6). I was already 18.

I made my girlfriend pregnant and so I came to Cape Town to look for work so that I could pay her family a lobola¹⁸ of five cows. I never went back to pay the lobola, although I am still in contact with my daughter. I worked as a labourer and learnt how to do plastering and brick-laying. I lived in Site C, Khayelitsha and later moved to Macassar.

In December 2001, my homeboy¹⁹ Zaza asked me to work with him. It was at Kyoko and Jonathan’s house. We worked together for the first time and after that we started working together more.

One day in 2003, Zaza told me about Nichiren’s Buddhism. He said Kyoko told him about this religion. But it was only in March that I attended my first meeting at Zaza’s house in Khayelitsha. I thought the chanting was a bit difficult at first but I liked the meeting because

¹⁷Note to 2008 edition: Sadly, Nwabisile passed away in 2007. He is remembered, very fondly, by Cape Town members.

¹⁸Lobola. Bride-price, traditionally payable on marriage in S. African societies.

¹⁹Homeboy. Someone who comes from the same village.

everyone was teaching me the right things to do. I started chanting by myself and it became easy. I liked it.

Since then, I have been chanting at my place and attending meetings whenever I could. I feel I have changed something in my life.

Firstly, I used to be a heavy drinker. Every weekend, from Friday to Monday morning I used to drink until my money was finished. And I used to borrow money from someone on Mondays.

Now, I can say to myself, “I am not drinking!” or, “I will only be drinking this much.” Sometimes, even when my friends are drinking next to me, I can stay without a drink. This also means I can save some money and do not have to borrow money from others all the time.

Also, I now live in Masiphumelele and this place is much closer to my work. Before I started chanting, I was in Khayelitsha and I used to spend a lot of money on taxis but now I bought a second-hand bicycle and I ride to work most of the time.

I like going to SGI meetings because I listen to everyone and I can learn from everyone what is right and what is not right for my life. I did not complete school but I feel I am learning things when I come to meetings. It makes me think about things when I get home.

Just before I started chanting, my girlfriend died of TB. Zaza and Kyoko encouraged me to go for an HIV test. I thought it was better to know my status so that I could get treatment. The result was positive but I did not feel too bad because I know Zaza is also HIV positive but he was strong. We share this information and encourage each other. And whenever I am scared I go and chant alone in my place until I feel alright inside me. I want to keep chanting and continue to improve my life. I do not want to disappoint my family. – interviewed by Kyoko Kimura

21 SINGLE-MINDEDLY DESIRING TO SEE THE BUDDHA

“Single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha” may be read as follows: single-mindedly observing the Buddha, concentrating one’s mind on seeing the Buddha, and when looking at one’s own mind, perceiving that it is the Buddha. – Letter to Gijo-bo: *WND I*, 389-390

WHEN we are chanting it is very important to try to concentrate single-mindedly on the Gohonzon with the strong desire to reveal the Buddha state. That is all we need to do. How much one chants about a particular problem is not the issue, although of course it is sometimes important to chant enough to develop really strong concentration and determination. In fact, one of the main purposes of doing gongyo is to train ourselves to concentrate on revealing Buddhahood when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Mr Matsuda explains the difference concentrated daimoku can make in the following quotation from his lecture:

If you have a problem, worry, heartache, or the like, or if you have a goal or personal pursuit, it may become central to your thoughts. Then, you cannot see it in proper perspective and you may fail. If, in such cases, you bring the Gohonzon to the core of your thoughts, however, you can discover the most appropriate approach to your particular situation, wisdom welling up from within.

The crucial point is for the believers in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism to be able to make the great leap required in centralizing the Gohonzon in their lives . . . The vital flow of one’s Buddha nature, triggered by the chanting of daimoku, can cut through any type of karma of destiny and change it for the better. When the karma is changed, the problem associated with it will be changed also.

– *Prue Banerji, UKE April 1994, No. 274, 29*

22 ONENESS OF SELF AND ENVIRONMENT

Life at each moment encompasses the body and mind and the self and environment of all sentient beings in the Ten Worlds as well as all insentient beings in the three thousand realms, including plants, sky, earth, and even the minutest particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the entire realm of phenomena and is revealed in all phenomena. To be awakened to this principle is itself the mutually inclusive relationship of life at each moment and all phenomena. – On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: *WND I, 3*

Buddhism is like the body, and society like the shadow. When the body bends, so does the shadow. – A Comparison of the Lotus and Other Sutras: *WND I, 1039*

CENTRAL to these teachings is the profound understanding that, whilst a human being is supported and affected by his or her environment, inevitably the life-link connecting us with all that surrounds us, carries a two-way flow of influences. Thus the actions, or causes which we make in our turn as individuals, also affect everyone and everything else around us. Nichiren Daishonin likened us in this respect, to a body and circumstances and environment to its shadow. Thus, he said, if the body bends, the shadow bends too. And this shadow is cast, in environmental terms, far out, beyond the fellow humans with whom we relate, to every tree or insect, to the rivers and winds, out into space even to the cosmos itself. It is like the ripples, he said, form a stone dropped in a pond, which will travel outwards to its furthest reaches.

It stands to reason therefore, that if as humans, we are to create a progressive and vibrant, yet harmonious world in which to live, work and be happy, first we must learn to respect — rather than ignore or ruthlessly exploit — the supreme dignity and greatness of life. Not only the magnificent harmony and order of nature but all things about us, including our fellow human beings. Secondly, we must learn how to be at peace with ourselves, for it is only through such respect for

our own life that we can discover respect for every other living thing, including our fellow men and women . . .

Nichiren Daishonin termed this essential inner harmony shikishin funi — the oneness of body and mind. Whilst the oneness of life and its environment he termed *esho funi*. . . – *An Inextricable Relationship*, RC: 5, 19

23 NAM-MYOHO-RENKE-KYO II

What then does myo signify? It is simply the mysterious nature of our life from moment to moment, which the mind cannot comprehend or words express. When we look into our own mind at any moment, we perceive neither color nor form to verify that it exists. Yet we still cannot say it does not exist, for many differing thoughts continually occur. The mind cannot be considered either to exist or not to exist. Life is indeed an elusive reality that transcends both the words and concepts of existence and nonexistence. It is neither existence nor nonexistence, yet exhibits the qualities of both. It is the mystic entity of the Middle Way that is the ultimate reality. Myo is the name given to the mystic nature of life, and ho, to its manifestations. Renke, which means lotus flower, is used to symbolize the wonder of this Law. If we understand that our life at this moment is myo, then we will also understand that our life at other moments is the Mystic Law. This realization is the mystic kyo, or sutra. – *On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: WND I, 4*

DAIMOKU is the fundamental rhythm of the universe, the most revered of voices. Nichiren Daishonin writes: “[W]hen once we chant Myoho-rence-kyo, with just that single sound we summon forth and manifest the Buddha nature of all Buddhas. . . and all other living beings. This blessing is immeasurable and boundless” (*WND I*, p. 887).

He also writes: “We, too, are the eggs of ignorance, which are pitiful things, but when nurtured by the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which is like the warmth of the mother bird, [we] are free to soar into the sky of the true aspect of all phenomena and the reality of all things” (*WND I*, 1030). Not sparing one’s voice doesn’t refer to loudness or volume. It means the great voice of compassion that seeks to bring all beings to enlightenment . . .

The SGI resounds with many voices. The most basic voice is our earnest chanting of daimoku. But we also hear the warm voice of encouragement, the vibrant voice of courage, the heartfelt voice of joy, the earnest voice of pledge and commitment, and the clear voice of wisdom. They are the source of an infinite wellspring of benefit. – *DI, The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, Vol. 1, 81*

24 OVERCOMING ILLNESS

Yet since the Lotus Sutra answers one’s prayers regarding matters of this life as well, you may still survive your illness. – Encouragement to a Sick Person: *WND I*, 82

SICKNESS is classified in Buddhism as one of the four universal sufferings — birth (which includes the suffering inherent in day-to-day life after), sickness, old age and death — which Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha clarified. From the standpoint of Nichiren Buddhism, sickness is not merely a suffering that we all experience but a special opportunity to embrace faith in the Gohonzon. Through sincere practice of Nichiren Buddhism, it is possible to transform any sickness into a springboard for personal growth and happiness.

Does this mean that if we chant and practice every day we will never get sick? No, because sickness is an inherent and inevitable part of our lives as we repeat the eternal cycle of birth and death. So, “overcoming” in this sense is not just about putting an end to an illness, but on a more fundamental level, about triumphing over its

negative effects; in other words, it concerns our state of life — developing a solid self, based on faith in the Gohonzon, that no sickness can defeat.

That is exactly why an illness holds such a great opportunity to deepen our faith. It represents the potential to overcome, through faith and wisdom, the karma that causes us to suffer or give in to defeat. In this sense it is our inner attitude in response to the external cause of sickness that plays the crucial role in determining the outcome. For instance, when we are sick it is easy to feel discouraged, sapped of our strength or even helpless. But being sick does not rob us of our Buddha nature and, therefore, does not rob us of our ability to tap into our wisdom, vitality and the courage to triumph over it through our determined practice of faith.

So, if we decide that “this illness is an opportunity to further my human revolution,” such a positive and courageous response will enable us to establish both stronger faith and a higher state of life. As Nichiren Daishonin points out, “Illness gives rise to the resolve to attain the way” (*WND I*, 937).

25 ~ SHAKYAMUNI’S ENLIGHTENMENT

At his place of enlightenment, the World-Honoured One first revealed... the perfect interfusion of all things, and the subtle and wonderful great teaching for immediate attainment of the ultimate fruit. At that time, the Buddhas of the ten directions appeared on the scene, and all the bodhisattvas gathered about like clouds.

– The Opening of the Eyes I: *WND I*, 233

UNDER the pipal tree, having defeated his demons, Shakyamuni now focused on his past. No sooner had he looked back over his present life, than images of his immediately preceding life began to appear. Memories of countless former existences came back to him vividly one after another. And further beyond that still, he recalled countless formations and destructions of the universe.

At that moment, all fears and doubts that had resided in him in the depths of his life like a heavy sediment since birth evaporated. He had unlocked within himself a state of being akin to commanding a clear, unhindered view in all directions from the top of a lofty mountain peak.

With this sharply-focused inner vision, Shakyamuni turned his attention to the karma of all living beings. Some were born into misery while others, into fortunate circumstances.

“Those burdened by the karma to be unhappy,” he silently observed, “have in some past lifetime, through their actions, words or thoughts, committed evil deeds and slandered the practitioners of the true Law. Their attachment to erroneous views formed the basis for mistaken actions. In contrast, those who were good and virtuous and conducted themselves correctly based on correct views enjoyed happiness in later existences.”

As night deepened around him, Shakyamuni continued his profound spiritual quest with a sense that he and the infinite universe were one.

Dawn was drawing near. At the very moment the morning star began to shine in the eastern sky, something happened.

Like a limitless penetrating beam of light, Shakyamuni’s wisdom suddenly broke through to illuminate the eternal, immutable truth of life. He trembled with emotion, his face radiant and tears filling his eyes.

“This is it!”

In that instant, Shakyamuni attained a profound awakening. He had finally become a Buddha—one enlightened to the supreme truth. He felt he could now move and act freely based upon the Law of life.

Now Shakyamuni understood: “The entire universe is subject to the same constant rhythm of creation and change. This applies to human beings, equally. Nothing, either in the world of nature or society, knows even a moment of stillness or rest. All phenomena in the universe emerge and pass into extinction through the influence of some external cause. Nothing exists in isolation; all things are linked together over space and time, originating in response to shared causal relationships. A Law of life permeates the whole process.”

Shakyamuni had grasped the wondrous truth of existence. He was convinced that he could develop himself limitlessly through this Law he had awakened to.

Shakyamuni thought: “Unaware of this absolute truth, people live under the illusion that they exist independently of one another. This ultimately makes them prisoners of their desires, estranging them from the Law of life, the eternal and unchanging truth of existence. They wander about in darkness, sink into unhappiness and suffering.

“But such darkness stems from delusions in one’s own life. By confronting the evil in our own lives — this delusion and ignorance — we can open the way to true humanity and indestructible happiness.”

Bathed in the joy of awakening to the Law, Shakyamuni watched the light of a new morning spread over the land. – *NHR3, 155-9*

26 DEALING WITH DEATH

To look on birth and death with abhorrence and try to escape them is termed delusion, or initial enlightenment. Perceiving the originally inherent nature of birth and death is termed awakening, or original enlightenment. Now when Nichiren and his followers chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, they realize the originally inherent nature of birth and death, and the originally inherent nature of ebb and flow. – *Gosho Zenshu, 754*

THE eternal Mystic Law encompasses both life and death. The birth and death of all forms of life, the emergence and extinction of all phenomena, are birth and death in the realm of the Mystic Law.

Although in essence our lives are eternal, no one can escape the cycle of birth and death. The important question is: will we view birth and death as an endless, suffering-filled cycle of rebirth in the six paths, or will we view birth and death as an aspect of the Mystic Law, seeing its true intrinsic nature, fragrant with the four noble virtues of Buddhahood? It was Nichiren Daishonin who opened the way for all people to turn the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death into

the profound tranquillity and joy of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity. – *DI, SGI Newsletter 6052*

27 TRANSFORMING YOURSELF

Such persons, who honestly discard expedient means, put faith in the Lotus Sutra alone, and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, will transform the three paths of earthly desires, karma, and suffering into the three virtues of the Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation. – The Entity of the Mystic Law: *WND I*, 420

NICHIREN taught that sufferings arise from “looking outside of oneself” for the cause or the solution to problems. The fact that it is you who are suffering means it is your problem to solve, not someone else’s. If you’re looking for others to change, you may wait a very long time. Still, people make extraordinary efforts to modify the behavior of others in an effort to make relationships work. But ultimately this is as futile as cleaning the mirror in an attempt to clean your face. The mirror will just keep reflecting back the same image.

Through Buddhist practice, we start to see ourselves more accurately, perhaps for the first time in our lives, with all our weaknesses and strengths. Day after day, we come to an ever-deepening realization (although sudden, remarkable flashes of self-realization are quite common) that the relationships we have formed are a reflection of our own state of life. Then we can embark on the steady, long-term process of developing our wisdom and capacity as human beings.

The key to transforming relationships lies in the process of transforming ourselves. Since the only person whose behavior you control is yourself, use that power to the utmost. Work from the inside out.

Buddhism teaches that false attitudes or beliefs about the self and others, which lead to misery and suffering, can be traced to the “three poisons”: greed, anger and foolishness . . .

[In Buddhism] the poisoned self, the arrogant, self-regarding egomaniac within us all [is called] the lesser self. The ultimate purpose of Buddhist practice is to manifest a greater or true self. – *The Buddha in your Mirror*, 128-130

28 TURNING POISON INTO MEDICINE

Bodhisattva Nagarjuna in his Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom says, “[The Lotus Sutra is] like a great physician who can change poison into medicine.” – The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra: *WND I*, 146

Just as poison turns into medicine, so do ordinary individuals change into Buddhas. – The Teaching That Accords with the Buddha’s Mind: *WND I*, 969

THE Buddhism of the sun enables all people to reveal the three enlightened properties of the Buddha, to reveal their inherent state of life as a Buddha. Therefore, the Daishonin says that one “will be able to attain Buddhahood readily” (*WND I*, 884).

Stating that it is a simple matter to become a Buddha like Shakyamuni, the Daishonin writes: “In light of the line in the sutra, ‘hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us,’ there can be no doubt that those who correctly practice the Mystic Law will easily become Buddhas equal to Shakyamuni” (GZ, 817); and “As the sutra says, ‘hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us,’ you can readily become as noble a Buddha as Shakyamuni” (*WND I*, 1030).

This is the beneficial power of the Gohonzon. Because the Mystic Law is the wonderfully efficacious medicine that can cure the sufferings of all living beings of the Latter Day, absolutely anyone can attain the life-state of Buddhahood. – *DI, SGI Newsletter 5697* (*WND IW*)

29 ~ SHAKYAMUNI’S FIRST TEACHINGS

It is impossible to repay my debt of gratitude to Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. – On Establishing the Four Bodhisattvas as the Object of Devotion: *WND I*, 977

[Shakyamuni] left the palace of King Shuddhodana at the age of

nineteen and entered Mount Dandaka, where he was to carry out ascetic practices for twelve years. At that time he was attended by the [five ascetics]. Of these five, however, two left Shakyamuni during the sixth year, while the remaining three deserted him in the next six years. Alone, Shakyamuni continued his practice and became the Buddha. – The Farther the Source, the Longer the Stream: *WND I*, 941

SHAKYAMUNI had learned that the five ascetics with whom he had formerly practised austerities in the woods of Sena had moved to the Deer Park [near Varanasi].

“I shall teach the Law to them first,” he thought. He wanted his friends to be the first to hear of the Law of life to which he had awakened. It was a perfectly natural expression of his sincerity and friendship.

As his five friends diligently practised austerities in the Deer Park, one of them noticed a figure approaching in the distance. It was Shakyamuni.

The five ascetics [who considered Shakyamuni a dropout] sat in stony silence, glaring frostily at Shakyamuni as he approached. His presence was dignified. As he drew near and addressed them with a smile, the five rose to their feet in spite of themselves. His voice resounded with an alluring force they could not ignore.

The Shakyamuni standing before them was a far cry from the person they remembered. His eyes were ablaze with deep conviction, and his bearing exuded dignity, self-confidence and pride.

Faced with the luminescence of Shakyamuni’s life, the five finally decided to abandon their austerities and seek the teachings of the Buddha. Shakyamuni stayed at the Deer Park and began a communal life with his friends in order to teach them the Law.

Before long, one of the five ascetics, Kaundanna, attained the insight to understand Shakyamuni’s teaching. By doing so, he proved that the Law Shakyamuni had awakened to was also within the grasp of all ordinary people. This marked the birth of Buddhism as a compassionate practice that went beyond seeking only personal benefit and enlightenment. – *DI, NHR3, 160-64*

30 LEARNING TO LOOK AFTER MYSELF

EXPERIENCE:—

ZOLISA SASA, MASIPHUMELELE, CAPE TOWN

MY NAME IS Zolisa Sasa, also known as Zaza. I grew up in Lady Frere in the Eastern Cape. I came to Cape Town in 1989, when I was 20 years old. I came here to find a job because there was no work in the Transkei. At first I worked as a gardener in Muizenberg but my employer soon realised that I was very good with my hands and she started teaching me how to build with stone. I liked this work very much, so I became a stonemason.

In 2000 I had the first of a series of jobs in Clovelly. In 2001, I met Kyoko's family there, who had just moved to Cape Town. In 2002 and 2003, I worked at Kyoko and Jonathan's house a few times. One day, when we were going to a hardware shop, Kyoko asked me if I was a Christian. I said I only prayed to the ancestors. She explained to me about Buddhism and then invited me to a Buddhist meeting. I became a Buddhist in August 2003. I liked chanting and I also liked the fact that we pray for the ancestors in the silent prayers.

Before I started chanting, I used to drink a lot, and I did not always have work. Sometimes, I did not work for two weeks and just stayed at home. I was suffering inside because I did not know what to do with my life. After I started chanting Kyoko and some other members sometimes came to visit my home in Khayelitsha. At that time I started to get sick from TB and I went for a HIV test. The result was positive.

Hearing the result did not make me feel weak. I felt strong because I was chanting a lot. But my body soon became very weak and one day Kyoko came to visit me and she took me to a hospital. I had water in my lungs and thrombosis. The tablets for TB and tablets for thrombosis did not work well together. I stayed in hospital for one month.

After I came out of the hospital, I slowly started working again as a stonemason. I had more and more work and I started employing more people from Khayelitsha. My income increased. I stopped drinking too much. I was so happy because as I started to look after

myself better, I was earning more money at the same time. I went to many Buddhist meetings and told many friends and families about chanting.

In the meetings I learn a lot by talking with other members. I love music and plays and I enjoy it when we sing songs and do plays. I want to encourage our SGI to start a choir and I want to be part of it. Last year I had so much work that I did not even have a Christmas holiday! I want to have my own car and started chanting for it last year. I did get the learner's licence. Now I am chanting for the driver's licence and a car.

31 ~ SHAKYAMUNI'S PERSECUTIONS

Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, was cursed by all the followers of non-Buddhist teachings and labeled as a man of great evil. – The Opening of the Eyes II: *WND I*, 287

The Thus Come One Shakyamuni suffered innumerable persecutions: For ninety days he was forced to eat horse fodder; a huge boulder was dropped on him, and though it missed him, his toe was injured and bled; a group of eight monks led by Sunakshatra, in their conduct appearing to be the Buddha's disciples, but in spirit siding with the non-Buddhist teachers, watched every moment of the day and night for a chance to kill him; King Virudhaka killed countless members of the Shakya clan; and King Ajatashatru had innumerable disciples of the Buddha trampled to death by mad elephants and subjected the Buddha to a series of severe trials. – On Persecutions Befalling the Sage: *WND I*: 996

THE MAJOR persecutions Shakyamuni encountered in his lifetime came to be known as the “nine great ordeals” . . .

The Buddha's growing movement, which included many wealthy merchants, warriors and even the king himself had begun to deprive the [priestly] Brahmins of followers and donations.

One of Shakyamuni's most noteworthy obstacles . . . was his betrayal by Devadatta. By all accounts, [Devadatta] appears to have been a very bright young man who converted to Buddhism early in his youth and for a while applied himself purely to his Buddhist practice. He came to be looked up to by those around him.

As he approached middle age, however, the worldly honour and fame he enjoyed began to fan his ambition for even greater fame and fortune. [He gained the patronage of Prince Ajatashatru who sent him gifts.] Devadatta coveted these gifts and indulged himself in them.

Under the guise of concern for his mentor's health, he urged Shakyamuni to retire and pass the reins of leadership of the Buddhist order to him. Shakyamuni realised that he would have to correct the distortion in Devadatta's mind by reprimanding him strictly now, in front of the [Buddhist assembly].

"Enough!" cried Shakyamuni in fiery rebuke. "Your true intention is more than obvious. I would not even entrust the leadership of the order to the honourable disciples Shariputra or Maudgalyayana. How could you then possibly expect me to leave it to someone like you, a devourer of others' spit!"

Devadatta shook with rage [and] hastily took his leave.

Shakyamuni addressed his disciples: "Devadatta has finally revealed his true colours. Go and make his true nature known in Rajagriha. Proclaim: This is not the same Devadatta as before; he has become greedy . . ."

Shakyamuni's intention was to teach his disciples what would happen if they lacked the firm resolve to thoroughly oppose evil: those perpetrating the evil would take advantage of this, opening the way for the destruction of goodness. – *DI, NHR3, 180-98*

32 EARTHLY DESIRES ARE ENLIGHTENMENT

Bound as we common mortals are by earthly desires, we can instantly attain the same virtues as Shakyamuni Buddha, for we

receive all the benefits that he accumulated. The sutra reads, “Hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us.” This means that those who believe in and practice the Lotus Sutra are equal to Shakyamuni Buddha. – Letter to the Sage Nichimyo: *WND I*, 323

THE Daishonin’s Buddhism . . . explains that both “earthly desires” and “enlightenment” are intrinsic to our lives. So any intent to deny either is itself a delusion. In this regard, the Daishonin states: “Among those who wish to become Buddhas through attempting to eradicate earthly desires and shunning the lower nine worlds, there is not one ordinary person who actually attained enlightenment. This is because Buddhahood cannot exist apart from the lower nine worlds” (Gosho Zenshu, 403).

The Daishonin defines “The obstacle of earthly desires” as “the impediments to one’s practice that arise from greed, anger, foolishness, and the like” (*WND I*, 501). Earthly desires such as greed, anger, stupidity, arrogance and doubt have a negative influence upon our lives, causing delusion and suffering.

The Daishonin teaches that since such earthly desires are ever-present, we must develop wisdom and inner strength so that they do not influence us negatively, and so that we may transform these functions into a driving force for our spiritual growth. – “*Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment*”: *Taking Control Of Our Lives, SGI-USA*

33 THE COURAGE TO OVERCOME HATRED AND SLANDER

People will slander each other or fawn upon one another, and the laws will be twisted until even the innocent are made to suffer. – On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: *WND I*, 8

. . . It seems to me that restraining those who slander the Law and

respecting the followers of the correct way will assure stability within the nation and peace in the world at large. – *ibid.*, 18

T' IEN-T' AI [says that] to “serve” the Buddha is to “hear” the teachings. “Hearing” in this context is not merely listening to words; it means a life-to-life interchange. *Onshitsu* (hatred and jealousy) critically impedes this life-to-life contact of faith. To define *onshitsu*, Nichiren Daishonin quotes Miao-lo in the Gosho: “*On* indicates having ill feelings, and *shitsu* means unwillingness to listen [to the Buddha’s teaching].”

Think hard about what he means by “unwillingness to listen.” . . . Common mortals remain common mortals exactly because they do not like hearing what is disagreeable and painful. On the contrary, they are all too easily swayed by flattery and adulation. As long as you take the line of least resistance, you cannot expect to grow. Worse, you are creating the cause for your own ruin, since you surround yourself with people who do not help build inner strength, but rather, serve to tear it down . . .

The horrible aspect about *onshitsu*²⁰ is that it creates a wall between the hearts of members, destroying the unity. Once fenced off by these walls, our hearts become victim to the three poisons of greed, anger and stupidity. Then we unconsciously destroy all of our own good fortune. This is why individual guidance and sincere person-to-person encouragement are so significant.

In the long run, an organization can live up to its purpose only when it can nourish each individual member. True, it requires tremendous life force to listen to your troubled and grieved friends and it also takes tremendous courage to open your hearts to those who are hard to get along with. But the very difficulty involved is a valuable thing in attaining your own human revolution and awakening souls that have long lain dormant in the lives of those friends. I urge you to muster up your courage, to move, listen and speak to them all. The Daishonin says in the Gosho, “When you split one joint in the bamboo, all the others follow.”

So, no matter how harsh your situation may be, when you face it

²⁰Jap. word for destructive gossip and concealed criticism.

directly and break through it, like splitting one joint in the bamboo, you can create a new, much better situation. Above all, pray to the Gohonzon with this conviction in your heart, for every prayer allows your inner, true self to shine. – *DI, Selected Lectures on the Gosho 3*

34 BUDDHIST UNITY (ITAI DOSHIN)

All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo with the spirit of many in body but one in mind, transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. – The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life: *WND I*, 217

MANY bodies, one mind. This is the kind of unity where people are free to develop their individuality, while having a united aim. This is what Nichiren Daishonin is advocating as Buddhist unity and the way towards world peace (*kosen-rufu*).

Intolerance is all too apparent in today's world. Since the end of the cold war, ethnic conflict and tribalism have become rife. The inability of different groups of people to transcend their differences, or even tolerate each other, is the greatest threat to humanity in the present day and is the greatest cause of war, famine and environmental destruction.

Where do our differences come from? Daisaku Ikeda reminds us, "All life is equally worthy of respect. It is in terms of the state of life, spirit, and the earnest desire which individuals manifest, that they differ from each other."

When we think we dislike someone, we are basing our viewpoint on superficial reactions. What we dislike about them is their karma, stemming from the eighth consciousness. When we transcend the eighth consciousness, we find the ninth consciousness, or Buddhahood. At this level, life is totally pure and limitless: we are all connected, like individual droplets of water in the ocean. Water can contain all kinds of impurities, but in essence it is all still H₂O.

Similarly, at the level of the ninth consciousness, there are no differences — we are all part of Buddhahood and of each other. The benefit of making the enormous effort required to transcend the differences is our realization of our own Buddhahood which is synonymous with the recognition of Buddhahood in each other. This is what Daisaku Ikeda means when he says itai doshin is a way to attain Buddhahood. — *Peter Morris, UKE Feb. 1999*

35 THE EQUALITY OF BELIEVERS

Because each living being possesses the Buddha nature. — *WND I, p. 275*

When one chants the daimoku bearing in mind that there are no distinctions among those who embrace the Lotus Sutra, then the blessings one gains will be equal to those of Shakyamuni Buddha. — *The Fourteen Slanders: WND I, 756*

THE Latter Day of the Law²¹ is an “age of conflict.” Seemingly swept along by an irresistible force, countries and individuals are carried from one conflict to the next. The strength to stand firm against this raging current of the times can be found in an unshakable belief in the Buddha nature within ourselves and others, as well as in actions that put this belief into practice and show respect for the lives of all people.

This is because the irresistible momentum that leads to conflict arises from “ignorance.” In Buddhism, ignorance specifically means the lack of awareness or belief that all people possess the Buddha nature. It is also the dark impulse that drives one to disrespect human life and violate its innate dignity. The inherent devilish nature of authority and religion, the dominant cause of conflict in the Latter Day,

²¹Shakyamuni predicted three “ages of the Law” of approximately 1 000 years each, in which his pre-Lotus Sutra teaching would successively be ascendant, stable, and in decline.

has this ignorance as its foundation. – *DI, The Practice of respecting others: WND IW [17] (SGI Newsletter 5616)*

NICHIREN DAISHONIN did not teach that women and men are equal by virtue of being the same, but rather that everyone is equal from the viewpoint of the dignity of life. Every person is important, and through acknowledging and respecting our differences, we can see the greatness within each human life, regardless of gender or status. – *Kazuo Fujii & Bryan Holdsworth, UKE May 1997, 22*

36 MENTOR AND DISCIPLE – FINDING A ROLE MODEL

This means that both the teacher who expounds the principles of the Lotus Sutra and the disciple who receives his teachings will, in no long time, together become Buddhas through the power of the Lotus Sutra. – Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man II: *WND I*, 133

Our debt to our mentor, who bars us from the erroneous path and directs us to the correct path, is profound. – Goshō Zenshū 435

THE concept of teacher or mentor, and disciple, plays a crucial role in our Buddhist practice. Mentors prove the greatness of Buddhism through their own actions and are models of devotion to the spread of Buddhism. Disciples strive to learn the essential teachings of Buddhism from their mentors as they, too, work toward the shared goal of peace and happiness. Through their dedicated efforts, disciples actually live Buddhism instead of merely studying it as an intellectual concept.

In the Daishonin's Buddhism, mentor and disciple stand on absolutely equal footing, sharing the same goal of disseminating the correct Buddhist practice. The mentor values the disciple's potential while the disciple, inspired by the mentor's example, gains confidence

in his or her innate Buddhahood. For this reason, the success of such a relationship primarily develops through the disciple's self-awareness.

Because the three founding presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda²² were keenly aware of the importance of mentor and disciple, they spread Buddhism on an unprecedented scale, thus enabling millions of people to lead lives of supreme happiness. From their examples we can learn the essential spirit and practice of Nichiren Buddhism and, through sharing their commitment to humanity's peace and happiness, develop our own supreme potential for Buddhahood. – *The Journey Begins*, 43-5

TO THIS DAY, memories of my mentor, Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, lecturing on the Lotus Sutra, come vividly to mind like scenes in a great painting.

After the war, the Soka Gakkai was in a state of ruin as a result of the campaign that had been waged against it by the militarist government. President Toda began efforts to reconstruct the organization by delivering lectures on the Lotus Sutra to a handful of members.

As a participant in the seventh series of lectures he gave, I heard him speak on Sept. 13, 1948. That was in the autumn of my 21st year. The venue was the old Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Nishi-Kanda.

"I see that everyone's arrived," he began. There were 50 to 60 people present. President Toda, his eyes sparkling behind his glasses, gazed around the meeting place ... Then he cleared his throat and began lecturing in a frank and open manner.

I was instantly awestruck, electrified by the profound ideas, the great and intense confidence, the compassionate cry of concern for the world and humankind that seemed to gush from his very being.

President Toda would never toy or joke around with difficult ideas or concepts. His lectures were compassionate, straightforward and lucid. Yet they glowed with the light of extremely profound truth. They conveyed philosophy rooted directly in life experience and in the Law that pervades the infinite universe. They were filled with breathtaking drama and joyous music. At one point, as I listened to him speak, the sun seemed to rise in my heart, and everything became

²²Many in SGI have chosen to make Mr Ikeda their mentor.

illuminated brilliantly before my eyes. – *DI, Lectures on the Hoben and Juryo Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*

37 ~ SHAKYAMUNI AND THE LOTUS SUTRA

The Lotus and the Nirvana sutras represent the very heart of the doctrines that Shakyamuni preached during the five periods of his teaching life. – On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: *WND I, 49*

The Thus Come One Shakyamuni, in the presence of Many Treasures Buddha and the Buddhas of the ten directions, preached the Lotus Sutra over a period of eight years at the place called Eagle Peak northeast of Rajagriha in the kingdom of Magadha. – The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra: *WND I, 150*

Although both differ in many ways, contemporary scholars have already expressed the opinion, and it is my conviction as well, that the chief difference lies in the fact that the Lotus Sutra teaches that persons of the two vehicles can attain Buddhahood, and that the Buddha Shakyamuni in reality attained enlightenment at an inconceivably distant time in the past. – The Opening of the Eyes I: *WND I, 226*

SINCE the depth of Shakyamuni's understanding far surpassed that of even the most learned of his day, he had to prepare his listeners by first teaching them more easily understood doctrines, using parables and everyday analogies. In this way, he could elevate the life-condition of those he taught, while always holding to his ultimate aim of showing people that they inherently possessed Buddhahood and could develop the qualities needed to conquer their sufferings.

For some forty years following his awakening at age 30, he imparted to others portions of his own enlightenment. During the final eight years of his life, he expounded his ultimate teachings, which were later compiled as the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra is unique

among the teachings of Buddhism, because it affirms that the attainment of enlightenment is possible for all people without distinction of race, gender, social standing or education. Buddhism, as epitomised in the Lotus Sutra, is a powerful, life-affirming, egalitarian and humanistic teaching. – *The Winning Life*, 34

38 ~ THE PASSING OF BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI

“Therefore, in the sixth volume of the Nirvana Sutra, his final teaching delivered in the grove of sal trees, our merciful father Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, said, ‘Rely on the Law and not upon persons.’ – Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man II: *WND I*, 109

ARRIVING IN Kushinagara, Shakyamuni asked Ananda²³ to prepare a bed for him between two sal trees.

Sensing that Shakyamuni’s death was near, Ananda wept. Though he had heard from Shakyamuni many times of the impermanence of all things, when he thought of his mentor leaving this world for good, he could not hold back his tears. Sensing Ananda’s anguish, Shakyamuni called him to his side to cheer him.

Hearing that Shakyamuni was near death, townspeople who knew of him flocked to where he lay. They quietly paid their respects, wiping away tears as they returned to their homes . . .

[Shakyamuni then patiently expounded the Law to a wandering ascetic called Subhadra, who asked to become his disciple.]

Shakyamuni said quietly [then, to his anxious disciples]: “If there is anything you wish to ask me, please go ahead . . .”

He repeated the offer three times, but there were no questions. The disciples were so moved by their mentor’s desire to teach and

²³One of Shakyamuni’s 10 major disciples, known as the foremost in hearing Shakyamuni’s teachings. His excellent memory allowed him to play a leading role in compiling the teachings at the First Buddhist Council after Shakyamuni’s passing.

guide them, even in these final moments, that they could hardly hold back their tears.

Finally Ananda spoke: “Having received instruction from you on all manner of things in the past, none of us has any further doubts or questions.”

“I see. If you are free of doubts, you will surely hold fast to your faith and attain true enlightenment.”

Then, as if mustering all his remaining strength, he said: “All things are subject to decay. Exert yourselves diligently and complete your practice . . .” Shakyamuni closed his eyes and drew his last breath, peacefully entering an eternal slumber.

“World-Honoured One! . . .,” the disciples called out in anguish.

The pale yellow blossoms of the sal tree fluttered gently down onto Shakyamuni’s body. Such were the final moments of the Buddha—a human being and great teacher of all humankind. – *NHR3*, 215

39 BUDDHISM AND WOMEN

There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. – The True Aspect of All Phenomena: *WND I*, 385

As women, we have come a long way from the days of Shakyamuni’s provisional teachings, which denied enlightenment to women. Imagine being told that you could not attain enlightenment because you were a woman!

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

The teaching that women share the same potential as men for Buddhahood first appears in the Devadatta chapter of the Lotus Sutra with

the dragon king's daughter attaining enlightenment without changing her form. Moreover, in the Encouraging Devotion chapter, there are further predictions of nuns attaining Buddhahood. In fact, the Lotus Sutra is spilling over with the joy of opening the path of the Buddha Way to all living beings, including women.

SGI President Ikeda explains: "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging addresses everyone he encounters, men and women alike, with the promise: 'You are all practicing the bodhisattva way, and are certain to attain Buddhahood' (Lotus Sutra, 267). Viewed in its entirety, the Lotus Sutra takes it for granted that there is no distinction between men and women in attaining Buddhahood" (WLS 1, 88). – *Barbara Ford, April 6, 2001, World Tribune April 6, 2001, 2*

40 MY BRILLIANT CAREER

EXPERIENCE:–

CAROLINE MASEKO, JOHANNESBURG

I BEGAN PRACTISING Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism while I was a university student in the UK. I was studying Geography, without any thought as to what career I would follow afterwards. All I knew was that I did not want to become a geography teacher. After leaving university I spent a couple of years doing various part time jobs, which provided me with lots of interesting experience. However, I eventually felt that the time had come to decide what career I was going to pursue; it was very frustrating though as I really had no idea what I wanted to do.

At this time a fellow Buddhist explained how we tend to get tied up in knots thinking of the ways and means of achieving our goals, but Buddhism teaches us that what is important is to focus on our goal and to chant strongly. By doing this the action we need to take to achieve our goal will become clear. This encouraged me and I chanted with renewed determination. Although I still did not know what I wanted to do, I was clear about what I was aiming for and felt confident that I would achieve it.

A couple of months later I was chatting with an old friend who

suggested I become a primary school teacher. This had never occurred to me before. I had always thought that to become a primary school teacher one had to have a degree in education; but my friend told me I could do so by studying for a one-year postgraduate diploma. After a few more discussions with friends involved in education, I felt strongly that this was the path I should follow and was eager to get started.

I soon discovered that the closing date for enrolment for the next academic year had passed; all the colleges were full and I would have to wait until the following year. After initially feeling disappointed, I determined that I would start that year and wrote to several institutions, with the result that I was offered places at three colleges.

Twenty years later . . .

I have taught for a number of years now, first in London schools (in one of which I met my husband) and, more recently, here in South Africa. A year ago I began to reflect on my career again. After teaching in a poorly paid post with quite a heavy work load, I achieved my goal of finding another line of work which paid well, and was working as a freelance editor. While I enjoyed the work, I did not want to spend my days in front of a computer.

I then realised that my ideal job would be to go back to teaching reception class (Grade 0) — an age group I had taught for some years in London — and to be paid the proper salary for doing so!

At this time my family was moving to Johannesburg so I began looking for schools for my children. I went to one school that had been highly recommended and was told they had no place for my younger daughter. I found myself telling the school secretary that I was a reception class teacher and was invited to visit their two reception classes. I had a good chat with one of the teachers, exchanging ideas on early-years education, and feeling a bit envious of her job.

Out of the blue, a week or two later I received a call from the school asking me for my CV. The same teacher had since handed in her resignation to take up a post overseas, and I ended up taking her place. As I was teaching at the school, they were also able to give my daughter a place. Strangely enough, this is the school where we used to hold Buddhist meetings before we had our own centre.

I arrived at school on my first day of work feeling slightly nervous, only to be greeted by my wonderful new colleague with a big hug and the words, “I’m so glad you’re here!”

Things seemed to go well and I was receiving good feedback from the parents. I was also learning a great deal from my new colleague, who is well known in this field of education and many people are eager to learn from her—I have the good fortune to work and share ideas with her every day.

However, when the time came for the principal to make a class visit and watch me teaching I was quite nervous. I didn’t sleep well the night before but still woke up early to chant plenty of Daimoku.

I thought the visit seemed to go quite well, and over the next couple of days I got to hear that she told the chair of governors and the principal of our senior school all about my lesson and what a good appointment they had made.

Of course, all this was very nice to hear. But as I reflected, I realised that the greatest benefit was to know in my heart that I am fulfilling my mission in this life by doing the work that I can do best — which over the years has challenged me to transform my negative tendencies and to develop my compassion for all the children I teach and their families. And there is still lots of room for further growth and development. It is great to be able to say, “I love my job!”

41 ~ NICHIREN CONFIRMS SHAKYAMUNI’S PROPHECY

Once I was almost deprived of life. In the Kocho era I was exiled to the province of Izu, and in the Bun’ei era, to the island of Sado. Because I remonstrated repeatedly with the authorities, I have encountered one persecution after another. – The Place of the Cluster of Blessings: *WND I*, 1069

PREACHING THIS doctrine at the temple where Nichiren Daishonin had been educated precipitated the first of many persecutions and

attempts on his life. Persevering with equanimity despite such hardships, he continued to teach that chanting the phrase Nam-myoho-rence-kyo would lead practitioners to perceive their essential, enlightened nature and thereby attain Buddhahood. In order to enable people to sustain their practice after his death, he inscribed a mandala called the Gohonzon as the focus for the religious practice of his followers.

He taught that chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo to the Gohonzon would enable people to discover their own essential unity with the ultimate reality of the universe. According to Nichiren, this practice, when rooted in faith and sustained by study and compassion for others, is the way of enlightenment.

Nichiren spent his life teaching this doctrine, always supporting the spiritual growth of his lay followers as well as training young priests. In his final years Nichiren appointed six senior disciples to carry on his teaching. On his deathbed, he named one of them, Nikko, as his successor. He died on October 13, 1282. – *Resource Guide*

42 ~ NICHIREN DAISHONIN AT TATSUNOKUCHI

But we must recall that, when Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, and Many Treasures Buddha sat side by side in the treasure tower like the sun and moon, and the Buddhas who were emanations of Shakyamuni had come from the ten directions and were ranged beneath the trees like so many stars, then it was said that after the thousand years of the Former Day of the Law and the thousand years of the Middle Day of the Law, at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, there would be three types of enemies of the Lotus Sutra. – The Opening of the Eyes II: *WND I*, 272

OUT ON YUI BEACH as the party passed the shrine there, I spoke again. “Stop a minute, gentlemen. I have a message for someone living near here,” I said. I sent a boy called Kumao to Nakatsukasa

Saburo Saemon-no-jo [Shijo Kingo], who rushed to meet me. I told him, “Tonight, I will be beheaded. This is something I have wished for many years.²⁴ In this saha world, I have been born as a pheasant only to be caught by hawks, born a mouse only to be eaten by cats, and born human only to be killed attempting to defend my wife and children from enemies. Such things have befallen me more times than the dust particles of the land.

“But until now, I have never given up my life for the sake of the Lotus Sutra. In this life, I was born to become a humble priest, unable to adequately discharge my filial duty to my parents or fully repay the debt of gratitude I owe to my country. Now is the time when I will offer my head to the Lotus Sutra and share the blessings therefrom with my deceased parents, and with my disciples and lay supporters, just as I have promised you.”

Then the four men, Saemon-no-jo and his brothers, holding on to my horse’s reins, went with me to Tatsunokuchi at Koshigoe. Finally we came to a place that I knew must be the site of my execution. Indeed, the soldiers stopped and began to mill around in excitement. Saemon-no-jo, in tears, said, “These are your last moments!” I replied, “You don’t understand! What greater joy could there be? Don’t you remember what you have promised?”

I had no sooner said this when a brilliant orb as bright as the moon burst forth from the direction of Enoshima, shooting across the sky from southeast to northwest. It was shortly before dawn and still too dark to see anyone’s face, but the radiant object clearly illuminated everyone like bright moonlight. The executioner fell on his face, his eyes blinded. The soldiers were filled with panic. Some ran off into the distance, some jumped down from their horses and huddled on the ground, while others crouched in their saddles. I called out, “Here, why do you shrink from this vile prisoner? Come closer! Come closer!” But no one would approach me. “What if the dawn should come? You must hurry up and execute me — once the day breaks, it will be too ugly a job.” I urged them on, but they made no response.

²⁴The Daishonin is expressing not a self-destructive wish to die but joy that he is able to stand up for the ultimately precious Lotus Sutra.

They waited a short while, and then I was told to proceed to Echi in the same province of Sagami. I replied that, since none of us knew the way, someone would have to guide us there. No one was willing to take the lead, but after we had waited for some time, one soldier finally said, "That's the road you should take."

Setting off, we followed the road and around noon reached Echi. We then proceeded to the residence of Homma Rokuro Saemon. There I ordered sake for the soldiers. When the time came for them to leave, some bowed their heads, joined their palms, and said in a most respectful manner: "We did not realize what kind of a man you are. We hated you because we had been told that you slandered Amida Buddha, the one we worship. But now that we have seen with our own eyes what has happened to you, we understand how worthy a person you are, and will discard the Nembutsu²⁵ that we have practiced for so long."

Some of them even took their prayer beads out of their tinder bags and flung them away. Others pledged that they would never again chant the Nembutsu. After they left, Rokuro Saemon's retainers took over the guard. Then Saemon-no-jo and his brothers took their leave. – *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, 767-8*

43 CHANGING AND IMPROVING RELATIONSHIPS

Carry through with your faith in the Lotus Sutra. You cannot strike fire from flint if you stop halfway. Bring forth the great power of faith. . . – *Earthly Desires are Enlightenment: WND I, 319*

ULTIMATELY, the relationships you form reflect your own state of life. Only to the extent that you polish yourself now can you hope to develop wonderful bonds of the heart in the future. – *DI, The Way of Youth, 41*

²⁵Invocation of the Jodo or Pure Land sect, which taught that happiness could be secured in another world after death.

FUNDAMENTALLY, it means to chant diligently and to give your all to polishing your life. It's important to look at yourself and become aware of your issues and innate tendencies. Each of us has shortcomings, like blaming our unhappiness on others, lacking perseverance, or refusing to listen to others' opinions. These are basic faults that obstruct our growth and happiness. – *DI, NHR16, Chapter 1*

44 ~ BUDDHISM SPREADS AFTER SHAKYAMUNI'S DEATH

There is a time when the Hinayana²⁶ teachings are disseminated for the benefit of humanity, a time when the provisional Mahayana teachings are disseminated for the benefit of humanity, and a time when the true Mahayana teaching is spread to enable people to attain the fruit of Buddhahood. The two millennia of the Former and Middle Days of the Law required the spread of the Hinayana and provisional Mahayana teachings, but the first five hundred years of the Latter Day of the Law call for only the Lotus Sutra, the pure and perfect teaching of the one vehicle of Buddhahood, to be spread. – On practising the Buddha's teachings: *WND I: 394*

FOLLOWING Shakyamuni's passing, various schools of Buddhism spread throughout Asia. It was only natural that a broad range of interpretive schools should emerge, since in his fifty-year teaching career he had employed a wide variety of means by which to transmit his enlightenment to people of various capacities and circumstances.

The Lotus Sutra gained particular prominence as it spread through Central Asia into China, the Korean Peninsula and Japan. At the same time however, confusion began to reign as to the true nature of Buddhism and the relative superiority of the sutras. To solve the problem, leading minds of the time compared and systematized the various teachings. Eventually a scholar from China called Chih-i (later

²⁶Lit., 'lesser vehicle'.

known as the Great Teacher T'ien T'ai) developed a definitive standard by which to judge them.

This standard classified Shakyamuni's teachings according to the order in which he expounded them, the nature of the particular doctrine taught in each sutra and the method of its exposition.²⁷ By classifying the teachings in this manner, T'ien T'ai clarified that all the sutras were means of preparation for the highest teaching, the Lotus Sutra. – *The Winning Life*, 35

45 ~ KUMARAJIVA, TRANSLATOR OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

When both old and new translations are taken into account, we find that there are 186 persons who have brought sutras and treatises from India and introduced them to China in translation. With the exception of one man, the Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva, all of these translators have made errors of some kind.

Kumarajiva himself said: "When I examine the various sutras in use in China, I find that all of them differ from the Sanskrit originals. How can I make people understand this? I have only one great wish ... My tongue alone is pure and could never speak false words concerning the teachings of Buddhism. After I die, make certain that I am cremated. If at that time my tongue is burned, then you may discard all the sutras that I have translated."

... As a result, everyone from the ruler on down to the common people hoped they would not die before Kumarajiva [so that they might see what happened].

Eventually, Kumarajiva died and was cremated, and his impure body was completely reduced to ashes. Only his tongue remained, resting atop a blue lotus that had sprung up in the midst of the flames. – *The Selection of the Time: WND I*, 554-5

²⁷That is, the way it was taught.

KUMARAJIVA (344-413) was a prominent scholar who translated a number of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. In 401 he went to Ch'ang-an and immersed himself in the translation of Buddhist scriptures including the Lotus Sutra. His translation of the Lotus Sutra became the most widely used version in China and Japan. Titled *Myoho-renge-kyo* in Japanese, it is the translation Nichiren Daishonin relied upon in elucidating Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings. – *Glossary to WND I*

46 THE TREASURE TOWER EMERGES AT THE CEREMONY IN THE AIR

There is no doubt, however, that in my present life I am the votary of the Lotus Sutra, and that in the future I will therefore reach the seat of enlightenment without fail. Judging the past from this point of view, I must have been at the Ceremony in the Air. There can be no discontinuity between the three existences of past, present, and future. – *The True Aspect of All Phenomena: WND I, 386*

M^R_{Air}²⁸ Toda made the following comment on the Ceremony in the

The supremely wondrous state of Buddhahood is latent within each of our lives. The power and nature of this state of life are beyond our imagination and our ability to describe in words. Yet we can manifest this state in our own lives. The ceremony that takes place in the “Emergence of the Treasure Tower” chapter [of the Lotus Sutra] reveals that we, too, can indeed manifest the state of Buddhahood dormant within us.

²⁸The Ceremony in the Air is the grand climax of the Lotus Sutra, a mythological event which symbolically confirms the truth of Shakyamuni's teachings to his assembled disciples.

Mr Toda taught us clearly what the Treasure Tower is and the significance of its emergence. That colossal Treasure Tower is an expression of the state of Buddhahood that lies dormant within each of us. It teaches us the infinite nobility of life. – *DI, WLSI, A Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century, "From Eagle Peak to the Ceremony in the Air, and Back to Eagle Peak"*

47 SEX, SEXUALITY AND GENDER I

For all those who wished to believe the Lotus Sutra and yet could not do so with complete certainty, the fifth volume presents what is the heart and core of the entire sutra, the doctrine of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form. It is as though, for instance, a black object were to become white, black lacquer to become like snow, an unclean thing to become clean and pure, or a wish-granting jewel to be placed into muddy water [to make it transparent]. Here it is told how the dragon girl became a Buddha in her reptilian form. And at that moment there was no longer anyone who doubted that all men can attain Buddhahood. – The Sutra of True Requit: *WND I*, 930

BUDDHISM is refreshingly free of any rules about what is right, wrong or appropriate, on the matters of gender and sexuality. There is no list of dos or don'ts, rather, those who practice the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin are taught to take total personal responsibility for absolutely everything in their lives, including how they express their gender and their sexuality.

Buddhism teaches fundamental respect for each individual and the dignity of life itself. There is absolutely no requirement to renounce anything in order to practice — the wisdom as to how to behave emerges from chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, from understanding that every cause we make will have an effect. Anyone, Nichiren Daishonin said, can attain Buddhahood in this lifetime . . .

If no one is excluded from attaining enlightenment, it is clear that there is no room for discrimination in Buddhist teachings on grounds

of gender or sexual proclivity. We are who we are because, in terms of our karma, we have made the causes to be born into a particular cultural environment at a particular time, with particular characteristics which affect our personality, ability and physical features — including our genitalia.

In terms of the Buddhist view of the eternity of life, we have been born into different circumstances at different times, sometimes as males and sometimes as females. Our entity has no gender, no sexuality — in fact, no form at all. However, when we are born into a particular existence, we manifest our own particular physical, mental and emotional characteristics, through which we relate to society . . .

There is no concept of ‘fault’ in Buddhism, which teaches that all people are equally worthy of respect because everyone possess Buddhahood. When we take full responsibility for our situation we can use the immeasurable power of our Buddhahood to change it . . . — *Win Hunter and John Delnevo, Sex, Sexuality and Gender, UKE Feb 1996, 4-7*

48 ~ BUDDHISM IN CHINA: T’IEN-T’AI

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai trusted and obeyed Shakyamuni and worked to uphold the Lotus school, spreading its teachings throughout China. — On the Buddha’s Prophecy: *WND I, 402* All of China joined in praising him as a Little Shakyamuni. — Reply to Hakiri Saburo: *WND I, 408*

MAHAYANA, within a few hundred years of its inception, split into two main schools. The first, Madhyamika, is grounded in the work of the great Indian philosopher Nagarjuna (c. 150–250) who elaborated the doctrine of sunyata, the non-substantiality or “emptiness” of all phenomena. The second school, Yogachara or Consciousness-Only school was based on yogic practice. For them, all phenomena arise from the vijñana, or consciousness, and the basis of all functions of consciousness is the alaya-consciousness.

Both schools spread into China, where there is a reliable record of a practicing Buddhist emperor by around 250CE. T'ien-t'ai, a major school within the Mahayana tradition, was founded in China by Chih-i (538–597). This school emphasized doctrinal studies and meditative practices based on the Lotus Sutra. It also taught the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the unification of the three truths and the six stages of practice. – *Resource Guide*

49 ~ DENGYO TAKES T' IEN T' AI'S DOCTRINES TO JAPAN

I do not know whether the Great Teacher Dengyo's inner enlightenment was inferior or equal to that of Nagarjuna and T'ien-t'ai, but I am convinced that, in calling upon all Buddhist believers to adhere to a single doctrine, he showed himself to be superior to Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu and to surpass even Nan-yueh and T'ien-t'ai. – *The Selection of the Time: WND I, 558*

AFTER TRAVELING to China for further studies, Saicho (767–822), also known as the Great Teacher Dengyo, returned to Japan in 805 and established what later became known as the Tendai sect.

According to Chih-i's interpretation, the Lotus Sutra proclaims the Buddha nature to be inherent in all human beings. This provided the theoretical basis for Nichiren's 13th-century assertion that all people can attain Buddhahood as they are and within the context of the phenomenal world. He taught that everyone has the potential to attain Buddhahood "in this lifetime" and "in one's present form" without going through countless lifetimes of Buddhist austerities. Nichiren was among the first to embrace the idea that Buddhahood is a real, rather than theoretical, possibility for all human beings and, within the context of feudal Japan, asserted the revolutionary view of the equality of men and women. – *Resource Guide*

50 MY FEAR OF THE FUTURE DISMANTLED

EXPERIENCE:—

CHARITY NTLA, JOHANNESBURG

IT ALL STARTED in 1995. My employer, Premier Food Industries, decided to close down our plant in response to the economic uncertainty following the first democratic elections. I saw the closure as a blessing in disguise that would give me time to pursue my studies. But although I did win a scholarship to study in the USA soon afterwards, I turned it down. My family was my priority and my wife and I had planned to have babies first. I invested my redundancy package into two businesses which my wife and I ran respectively, and for three years we lived comfortably.

Then an old friend invited me to be his partner and invest into a joint business venture dealing with precious stones. With absurd lack of foresight, I withdrew the bulk of the family savings to invest in this risky business. We drove my business vehicle to various countries in the SADC region to purchase the commodity.

In rural Zimbabwe while driving home one night we had a bad accident. A herd of cattle was lying across the road and we spun three times before coming to a halt on the wrong side of the road. Fortunately we were not crushed by the on-coming heavy duty traffic that frequented the road. Nonetheless my car was severely damaged and my insurance did not cover accidents outside South Africa. Worse still, it turned out that my 'friend' knew little about precious stones and had no reliable business contacts.

I suffered huge financial loss through this venture and my wife and I decided to sell her business. We sold on terms, but the buyer disappeared after paying only one third of the money. We approached an acquaintance, a well-known personality, for sponsorship for our remaining business.

Things looked promising, but in the process of finalising the deal he took action that grossly affected my family affairs without being invited to do so.

The result was the loss of our business and a high profile court

case that ran for four years—strategically planned by him to deplete my family’s financial reserves.

During this time I frantically sought employment to sustain my family. I tried everything to try and break the chain of poverty. Although I had a reasonable academic and technical background, I could not get a job. We were literally beggars as we struggled to make ends meet. My friends and relatives deserted me, my church disappointed me and neighbours grew tired of my family’s begging, labelling me as either a spent force or lazy for failing to provide for my family. Some “friends” even tried to coerce my wife to leave me. I perceived no purpose in life and questioned my own existence. On three occasions I contemplated suicide to escape the degradation. But my family, especially our kids, gave me reason to hang in there, so I persevered.

Then my wife started practising Nichiren Buddhism. At first I feared that two different faiths in one family would lead to divorce. I also feared that she had been recruited by a cult movement. But after practising for a few weeks my wife had an experience that impacted on my life. I gradually developed a cautious interest and asked my wife for literature so I could check out the tenets of this Buddhism. I found no harm in the information I read—instead I was amazed by the logic in the teachings. I decided to join my wife in this practice.

I had been haunted by traffic on the nearby freeway. The sound of motorists on their way to and from work made me feel worthless because I was not contributing to the economy of the country. But as I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo every single day, I gained confidence and I again saw meaning in life. This feeling gave me hope and all my fear of the uncertain future dismantled.

And suddenly one morning the telephone rang and I was invited for an interview. I had forgotten that I had applied for this job five months ago. I grabbed the opportunity with both hands and I got the job, which will enable me to pursue my long-cherished dream of studying.

Daimoku enabled me to break the chains of hopelessness and despair. I truly appreciate the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

51 WHAT'S ON THE GOHONZON?

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, the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life's functions. – The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon: *WND I*, 832

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 I*, 412

THE eternal life of the universe exists within each of us. The Gohonzon resides within each of us. The Daishonin's Buddhism is a philosophy of utmost respect for human beings and for life. Nichiren Daishonin embodied the essence of his own life in the form of the Gohonzon to make it possible for us to summon forth the Gohonzon within our lives. – *DI, Faith into Action*, 114

THE GOHONZON could be described as a map of a human being manifesting Buddhahood. The Gohonzon that people have in their own homes is a small copy, in the form of a paper scroll, of a transcription of the Dai-Gohonzon, which was inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin on 12 October 1279 . . . The most significant feature on the Gohonzon are the words "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren", written in large characters down the centre, indicating the fact that Nichiren Daishonin, an ordinary human being, himself embodied the ultimate truth of life, or Buddhahood. On either side are characters representing all aspects of life, both positive and negative, within us and our environment. – *SGL-SA Entrance Level Study Booklet*

52 RECEIVING GOHONZON

The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myohorenge-kyo. – *The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon: WND I, 832*

THE eternal life of the universe exists within each of us. The Gohonzon resides within each of us. The Daishonin's Buddhism is a philosophy of utmost respect for human beings and for life. Nichiren Daishonin embodied the essence of his own life in the form of the Gohonzon to make it possible for us to summon forth the Gohonzon within our lives. – *DI, Faith into Action, 114*

APPLYING FOR GOHONZON IN SOUTH AFRICA

Guidelines for receiving Gohonzon vary from country to country, according to local circumstances.

The most fundamental point is that a potential member should:

- clearly understand the nature of Buddhism, and be committed to making it a lifelong practice.

In South Africa, general guidelines are that a potential Gohonzon member should have been practising properly for six months, ie:

- Have learnt Gongyo, and be chanting twice daily
- Studying Buddhism
- Be regularly attending meetings

If you wish to receive Gohonzon,

- It is essential that you have an altar, and a butsudan (the cabinet which holds and protects the Gohonzon), and that your living circumstances are suitable

Examples of unsuitable circumstances might be opposition from family members, or not being sure of the security of your home.

If you wish to receive Gohonzon, you should speak to your group leader. They in turn should visit you with another leader to discuss your application, and to confirm that your altar is suitable.

In South Africa, ceremonies for bestowing Gohonzon are held on average once a year, and are combined with national or regional courses.

A small fee is payable when your Gohonzon application has been approved, to cover the cost of bringing the Gohonzon to South Africa. This fee is currently around R50.

Gohonzons are *entrusted* to us, not given to us, and so should be returned to SGI in the event of our death or our leaving the organisation.

Please note that while having Gohonzon is a wonderful aid to our practice, it does not by itself determine the benefit we get from practising. Nor should you feel that without a Gohonzon you will be less valued in the SGI community. It is sincerity and effort that determine our benefit and that command the special respect of fellow members.

53 THE CORRECT TEACHING FOR THE PEACE OF THE LAND

Now if we wish first of all to bring security to the nation and to pray for our present and future lives, then we must hasten to examine and consider the situation and take measures as soon as possible to remedy it. Why do I say this? Because, of the seven types of disasters described in the Medicine Master Sutra, five have already occurred. Only two have yet to appear, the calamity of invasion from foreign lands and the calamity of revolt within one's own domain. And of the three calamities mentioned in the Great Collection Sutra, two have already made their appearance. Only one remains, the disaster of warfare. – On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: *WND I*, 24

IN the past, “security” has solely implied national security. Protecting the state, protecting territorial integrity, has been the highest priority of countries around the world. But what kind of security is it

if, while the state is protected, the lives and dignity of each citizen are threatened?

Currently, the prevailing view of security is steadily being altered from one that focuses on the state to one that focuses on the human being. The idea of human security is based on the fundamental concept of protecting human life. It goes without saying that such thinking has emerged from the various global issues that threaten humanity's very existence — issues that include regional conflict, discrimination and other violations of human rights, growing poverty, the population explosion, and the destruction of the environment.

“Establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” is the most basic philosophy for correcting the fundamental impurities of life and realizing security for human society as a whole. There is no way that the Daishonin intended this ideal for Japan alone. Achieving world peace and bringing happiness to all humanity is the purpose of our Buddhist movement. Humankind now stands at an important crossroads. Will we descend into a world of violence and fear? Or will we construct a world of peace and security?

We must overcome war — the interminable karmic disease of humankind — and actualize the principle of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” on a global scale. That can only be realized through each individual effecting a change in the very core of their life. “A great human revolution in just a single individual can contribute to a change in the destiny of all humankind.” We are standing in the very forefront of this magnificent revolution. – *DI, WND IW5, Establishing the Correct Teaching II*

WHAT WE NEED today is a transformation in how society views the human being. When people's view of the human being changes, everything will change. You must not yoke yourself to nationality or ethnicity. You must not think of yourself as powerless, or as no more than a collection of matter. You must not regard your self as a slave to your genes. Fundamentally, you have limitless and immense potential. Fundamentally, the human being is one with the universe! Such is the immense power of one person! This is the message of the Lotus Sutra. – *DI, Conversations on the Lotus Sutra 25, 17-18*

54 THE EIGHT WINDS

Worthy persons deserve to be called so because they are not carried away by the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honor, praise, censure, suffering, and pleasure. They are neither elated by prosperity nor grieved by decline. – The Eight Winds: *WND I*, 794

NICHIREN Daishonin refers to the events in life that disturb and weaken our mind, or will, as the eight winds. The main objective of practising Buddhism is to learn how to strengthen ourselves so that we can withstand the difficulties of life, while at the same time teaching others how they, too, can achieve this . . .

The eight winds are divided into two categories: the favourable winds of prosperity, honour, praise, and pleasure, and the unfavourable winds of decline, disgrace, censure and suffering. They are mirror images of each other. Prosperity, meaning monetary or material profits — or seeming good fortune — is the opposite of decline, or the loss of one's good fortune, including the loss of vigour and energy. Honour refers to building a reputation for oneself, whereas disgrace is to acquire a bad reputation. Praise refers to being commended or thought well of by others, whereas censure means to be condemned or blamed by others. Pleasure means a life filled with self-indulgence, whereas suffering is life filled with distress, problems and worries.

The winds — both favourable and unfavourable — all have powers to influence us. It is very easy to lose sight of our objectives, and neglect our faith, when swayed by the wind of prosperity. Likewise, obsession with our own honour becomes arrogance, and when we are affected by the tributes paid to us, it is easy to be carried away by the wind of praise. The pursuit of pleasure above all else allows our pursuit of enlightenment to decline . . .

This is because everything depends on our state of life from moment to moment; everything depends on our state of mind. Our inner life is always reflected in our outer world. Those times when we feel influenced by the force of difficulties are the very time to chant more,

the time to get encouragement to try and see things in a different way, to change our state of mind . . .

When we have strong determination and strong faith in our inner lives, we are not only able to withstand the eight winds, but also use them as stepping stones to attaining enlightenment. – *Sue Thornton, Goshō Study: The Eight Winds, UKE Mar 2000, 19-22*

55 SEX, SEXUALITY AND GENDER II

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo during the physical union of man and woman is indeed what is called “earthly desires are enlightenment,” and “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana.”
– Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment: *WND I*, 318

BUDDHISM regards our sexuality as one of our earthly desires . . . There is no judgement about our sexuality being good or bad—it just is. Whether our sexuality is expressed in a positive or negative way is up to us, depending to a great extent on our life-state when we express it (or decide not to). For instance, if we find ourselves attracted to someone we do not really respect, a sexual relationship is likely to be based on one of the lower worlds, perhaps Animality . . . In such a case, our behavior will be governed by our instincts, with little thought for the consequences of our actions. If, however, we chant about whether or not to have a sexual relationship, then we make the decision from our Buddhahood . . .

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the universal law of life, embraces everything so it is quite natural for us to chant about our sexuality. The question we need to ask ourselves in any sexual relationship — even a solo one — is, “Does this create value?” . . .

The great need and hunger to fulfil our sexual desires can smother our desire to give, to base our relationship on mutual respect. When we bring our Buddhahood to bear on every area of our lives then we have true freedom. Through our practice we can find the courage to express our true selves, whoever we are . . .

When we are comfortable with our identity we make a valuable contribution to the society of which we are members. When our actions are based on our greater, stronger selves, we can create value, but we have to know ourselves to do this with confidence. Whatever the vagaries of society, Buddhism is the one constant, teaching respect for ourselves and others. As Daisaku Ikeda said recently, “Nothing is greater or worthier of respect than yourself — this is the message that the Lotus Sutra calls out to each and every individual.” – *Win Hunter and John Delnevo, Sex, Sexuality and Gender, UKE Feb 1996, 9-13*

56 THE STRATEGY OF THE LOTUS SUTRA – VICTORY THROUGH FAITH

It is the heart that is important. No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire to wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other. “All others who bear you enmity or malice will likewise be wiped out.” These golden words will never prove false. The heart of strategy and swordsmanship derives from the Mystic Law. Have profound faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered. – *The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra: WND I, 1000-1*

IN our own practice, we are able to dispel the dark clouds of our negative karma through the power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. However, in order to manifest this power we must chant with a strong conviction, even though our circumstances may presently be filled with problems and worries. Throughout his teachings, Nichiren Daishonin encourages us to muster the powers of our faith and practice, and to “employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other.”

In our moments of deepest despair, we can instantly transform our state of life through the power of our prayers to the Gohonzon. When our life condition is elevated, our inner sufferings are transformed into

joy and appreciation, and we are able to change poison into medicine in the depths of our lives. As long as we persevere, our circumstances will eventually reflect this same state of joy, just as a mirror reflects the image. – *www.sgicanada.org*

WE ARE COMMON MORTALS still bound by delusion. What is it that can transform delusion into enlightenment? It is faith, and faith alone. – *DI, Selected Lectures from the Gosho*

57 THE IMPORTANCE OF DIALOGUE

You should always talk with each other to free yourselves from the sufferings of birth and death and attain the pure land of Eagle Peak, where you will nod to each other and speak in one mind.
– Flowering and Bearing Grain: *WND I*, 909

IN A WORD, the most important thing is reaching out and inspiring others to share our aspiration for world peace, and forging an alliance of good dedicated to realizing that cause. We have to tenaciously expand our circles of dialogue and understanding, based on our efforts to dispel fundamental ignorance and to enable each person to bring forth their enlightened Dharma nature so that they can transform the inner realm of their lives . . .

Anyone can cause the flower of Myoho-rengé (lotus of the Mystic Law) to blossom in the soil of their hearts. And anyone can become a votary, or practitioner, of the Lotus Sutra. It is important that we believe this, and that we possess an open mind and take action to engage others in dialogue.

To widely spread the Buddhism of the sun to dispel the darkness of fundamental delusion — this is our mission. In the depths of their lives, all people eagerly long to encounter the Buddhism of the sun. – *DI, WNDW: The Westward Transmission of Buddhism*

58 CAN I CHANGE SOMEONE'S KARMA BY CHANTING FOR THEM?

Admirable Nichiro, because you have read the entirety of the Lotus Sutra with both the physical and spiritual aspects of your life, you will also be able to save your father and mother, your six kinds of relatives, and all living beings. – Letter to Priest Nichiro in Prison: *WND I*, 204

FIRST LET US establish what is meant by the word karma. In A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts it is explained as follows: Potential energies residing in the inner realm of life which manifest themselves as various results in the future. The Sanskrit word karma originally meant action . . . thoughts, words and deeds. Every action, both good and evil, imprints a latent influence in one's life. The karma, when activated by an external stimulus, produces a corresponding effect. According to this concept, one's actions in the past have shaped his reality at present, and his actions in the present in turn determine his future.

Why might someone want to change another person's karma? If a friend or relative is experiencing illness, relationship problems, or some other difficulty, it is natural to want to alleviate that person's suffering. We might think the person needs to change his karma, the cause within, that is preventing him from being happy but feel that because he is so ill, or so unhappy, that it is impossible for him to do anything to help himself.

What we see on the surface of a person's life (e.g. a particular problem), may be just the tip of an iceberg. We don't have the right to make a judgment based on such limited knowledge of the complexity of that person's life. Also, our view may come from our own subjective standpoint, which is, of course, influenced by our own karma. It is worth checking the motives underlying our desire to change someone else's karma. Are they perhaps based on our own fears? Is it our own karma to suffer that we need to change?

The adage, “It is better to give a starving person a fishing-rod rather than just a fish,” is often used to explain the need to look long-term at complex problems. By telling people about Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, we can give them both the fishing rod and the fish. – *Ted Morino, SGI-USA Study Department Chief, Some Questions and Answers about Buddhism www.sgi-usa.org*

59 THE PRACTICE OF RESPECTING EACH OTHER

... all beings and environments in the Ten Worlds, from hell, the lowest, to Buddhahood, the highest, are without exception manifestations of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. – The True Aspect of All Phenomena: *WND I*, 383

SEEMINGLY swept along by an irresistible force, countries and individuals are carried from one conflict to the next. The strength to stand firm against this raging current of the times can be found in an unshakable belief in the Buddha nature within ourselves and others, as well as in actions that put this belief into practice and show respect for the lives of all people ...

Buddhism is always a win-or-lose struggle ...

Only through this fundamental struggle on the level of life itself can there be a change in the destiny of humankind. In this sense, as the reality of these times being an “age of conflict” becomes more deeply apparent, the active humanism of Nichiren Buddhism is needed more than ever ...

Each human being, without exception, is precious and irreplaceable. The Lotus Sutra thoroughly elucidates the truth of the sanctity of life and the supreme practice of respecting human beings. Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, demonstrated this spirit of the Lotus Sutra in his own selfless practice amid the harsh realities of society with all its suffering and strife. And he manifested this spirit of the Lotus Sutra as “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo”, which he

inscribed as the Gohonzon for us to use as a mirror to reflect our inner lives ... – *DI, WNDW 17 (SGI Newsletter 5616)*

60 OVERCOMING DOUBTS & HESITATION

If we are to believe these dying words of the Buddha, we must conclude that the Lotus Sutra is the only bright mirror we should have, and that through it we can understand the heart of all the sutras. – On Repaying Debts of Gratitude: *WND 1, 692*

EXPERIENCE:–

ELVIS OBENG, CAPE TOWN

DURING THE January 2005 Goshō Study, we had discussion in groups. The topic was, “What evil prevents us from practising Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism?” My contribution to the discussion was about the beginning stage of my practice:

I was introduced to this Buddhism on 13 June 1984 by a middle-aged man called Mr Gabriel Adade in Accra, Ghana. I used to live very close to where he lived. It was a few months after our Buddhist community centre in Ghana was officially opened. Two weeks after starting my on-and-off chanting, Mr Adade told me there was going to be an Annual General Meeting at the centre, and members from Nigeria, Ivory Coast and Togo were also attending. He encouraged me to try my best to attend that meeting, which was held on a Sunday. I was not working at the time, but Mr Adade encouraged me to chant strongly to be able to attend.

I was staying with my uncle then, who was working at The Ambassador Hotel as a chef. Fortunately, he was working night shift on the night before the AGM, so I set up a make-shift altar facing the wall and decided to chant at least one hour. After chanting for twenty minutes, I began to have some terrible doubts. I was questioning myself, “What are you doing here? Are you crazy, you are born into Christianity like your whole family and now you are chanting these strange words! You don’t know what you are doing, just give up!”

For a while I fought within myself, I believed in Nichiren's Buddhist philosophy, and I trusted Mr Adade. I then made a determination that I would give this practice a try. Since I made the determination to chant for an hour, I decided to continue chanting. After I completed the hour's chanting, I felt so good that it was clear to me I should go to the meeting. The next morning at 8:30am, I prepared myself and waited for my uncle to pick me up and take me to the meeting. When my uncle arrived, he asked me where I was going as I was all dressed up. I told him about this Buddhist practice and how important it was for me to attend the AGM. He paused for a while and then said, "Anyway, you are fortunate because a late plane arrived last night and the passengers who checked into our hotel gave us some good tips." He then gave me some money to the amount of R50! As Mr Adade could not attend the meeting that day, I ran to his house to announce my good news, shouting, "I am going, I am going!"

What I learnt from this experience was that if I were to give into my doubts, I would probably not be chanting or practising this Buddhism by now. I overcame my doubts and chanted the one hour I set out for myself, and I won at last!

61 BIRTH, AGING, SICKNESS AND DEATH ARE NOTHING TO FEAR

Having received life, one cannot escape death. Yet though everyone, from the noblest, the emperor, on down to the lowliest commoner, recognizes this as a fact, not even one person in a thousand or ten thousand truly takes the matter seriously or grieves over it. – Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man: *WND I*, 99

BIRTH, AGING, sickness, and death are the reality of human life. It is impossible to escape this reality, and trying to do so will not lead us to true happiness.

... In a sense, all phenomena in the universe are impermanent. Everything is in a constant state of flux. The entire universe is governed by the inexorable rhythm of birth, abiding, change, and extinction. Similarly, birth, aging, sickness, and death are woven into the very fabric of our lives.

Those who take their lives for granted are secretly afraid of death. Those who take their youth for granted dread the thought of growing old. Those who take their health for granted are stunned when they fall ill. The four sufferings of human existence cannot be avoided.

But for a Buddha — for someone who has awakened to the Mystic Law and perceived the eternity of life — birth, aging, sickness, and death constitute a fundamental rhythm; they are imbued with the fragrance of the four noble virtues of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity. The cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death of ordinary people who embrace the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and who thoroughly dedicate themselves to the Mystic Law are also imbued with the fragrance of these four virtues. This is what the Dai-shonin tells us. — *DI, WNDW 26: Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death I*

62 ICHINEN SANZEN — THE HEART IS LIKE A SKILLED PAINTER

Volume five of Great Concentration and Insight states: “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 ... — The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind: *WND I, 354*

THE THREE THOUSAND realms in a single moment of life describes how life operates, and at the same time points the way to revealing the ultimate state of life, Buddhahood. In terms of Buddhist practice, our single moment of life (ichinen) determines the entirety of the three thousand realms (sanzen) or the circumstances of our lives. Concentrated prayer to the Gohonzon and actions based on those prayers create the power to transform a negative experience into a cause for happiness. In one of his lectures, SGI President Ikeda explains as follows:

The Kegon Sutra says, “The heart is like a skilled painter.” Like a great painter, the heart freely creates representations of all things. One’s heart is the designer, the painter, the sculptor and the architect of his or her being.

The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai cites this sutra passage in explaining the doctrine of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms. He uses the image of a great painter to explain that the heart manifests in the three thousand realms of all phenomena.

It is our spirit, our life-moment, that counts. Our spirit is our hopes, our prayers. And it can be identified with the subconscious.

“What kind of future do I envision?” we may ask ourselves. “What kind of self am I trying to develop? What do I want to accomplish in my life?” We should paint the vision of our lives in our hearts as specifically as possible. This “painting” becomes the design for our future. The power of the heart enables us to actually execute a wonderful masterpiece in accordance with that design. This is the doctrine of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms. – DI, Learning from the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, 128-9

– *SGI-Canada website*

63 USING OUR KARMA TO OPEN UP THE FUTURE

... T'ien-t'ai says, "The ills and pains I suffer at present are all due to causes in the past, and the meritorious deeds that I do in my present life will be rewarded in the future." Likewise, the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra states: "If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present." *The Opening of the Eyes II: WND I, 279*

NO MATTER what one's karma, one can change it of one's own free will.

In other words, the Buddhist concept of karma is in no way what is ordinarily called fatalism or a mere simple philosophy. Some people labour under the illusions of fatalism or determinism, seeing only one aspect of Karma — that karma from one's past lives is encompassed in one's present life. At the same time, however, according to the karmic law of causality, at each moment we create fresh karma. This means that at the present moment also, of our own free will, we are creating new karma and opening up the future.

Thus, in Buddhism, humans are beings that, seeking freedom in the midst of inevitabilities, both base themselves on these inevitabilities and employ them as springboards to build a state of life in which they are utterly free. Consequently, by acting of their own volition to make karma and transform negative karma, all human beings are equally able, regardless of their present circumstances, to open up the path to self-realization and self-perfection — the golden path to improving their destiny. – *DI and Wickramasinghe: Space and Eternal Life, 118*

64 THE ESSENCE OF EVERYTHING IS NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is only one phrase, but it contains the essence of the entire sutra. You asked whether one can attain Buddhahood only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and this is the most important question of all. It is the heart of the entire sutra and the substance of its eight volumes. – The One Essential Phrase: *WND I*, 922

Even though one neither reads nor studies the sutra, chanting the title alone is the source of tremendous good fortune. The sutra teaches that women, evil men, and those in the realms of animals and hell—in fact, all the beings of the Ten Worlds—can attain Buddhahood in their present form. [This is an incomparably greater wonder than] fire being produced by a stone taken from the bottom of a river, or a lantern lighting up a place that has been dark for a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand years. – The One Essential Phrase: *WND I*, 923

BECAUSE THE Law is profound, its practice is simple. The more technology advances, machines become simpler to operate. Mr Toda went so far as to liken the Gohonzon to a “happiness-manufacturing machine”. And the switch for turning this machine on is chanting daimoku for oneself and others. It could be said that Nichiren Daishonin distilled Buddhism down to an essence of irreducible simplicity for the sake of all people . . .

The air around us is filled with radio waves of various frequencies. While these are invisible, a television set can collect them and turn them into visual images. The practice of chanting daimoku to the Gohonzon aligns the rhythm of our own lives with the world of Buddhahood in the universe. It “tunes” our lives, so to speak, so that we can manifest the power of Buddhahood in our very beings.

The Daishonin indicates in this Gosho that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the heart of the entire Lotus Sutra. It is the “eye” and essential

core of Buddhism. A comprehensive compilation of wisdom for helping people become happy, Buddhism has at its essence the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

This is why everything becomes a source of value, everything is brought to life, when we base ourselves on daimoku. The Daishonin teaches that myo in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo means “to revive, to return to life.” Nam-myoho-renge-kyo rejuvenates all knowledge; it revitalizes our daily lives. – *DI, Learning from the Gosho: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, Lecture 7*

65 BEHAVING HUMANELY TOWARDS ALL

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 I, 851-2*

BOTH SHAKYAMUNI and Nichiren Daishonin ultimately taught that a “single individual can save the world.” Buddhism strongly proclaims that there is nothing greater than the human being. It sets forth the “behavior as a human being” (*WND I, 852*) indispensable for pursuing the highest and most humane way of life, a life filled with compassion and courage. Buddhism allows people to develop their capacity for good actions and to defeat the fundamental ignorance that scorns the sanctity and dignity of human life. That is the substance of Buddhist practice in the Latter Day. – *DI, WNDW 17, The Practice of Respecting Others I*

66 FREEING OURSELVES FROM THE SUFFERINGS OF BIRTH AND DEATH

If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-rence-kyo. Chanting Myoho-rence-kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life. – *On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: WND I, 3*

NICHIREN DAISHONIN says that the means, or Law, for freeing ourselves from the illusions and sufferings of birth and death exists within our own lives. It is none other than Myoho-rence-kyo, which is the “mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings.”

The Daishonin established the means by which all people can live their lives based on this mystic truth—in other words, he revealed the Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the name of the mystic principle. It is also faith in that mystic principle. And it is the name given to the state of life that freely manifests this mystic principle — in other words, the state of Buddhahood. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the entity of the Law that simultaneously possesses both the cause and effect for attaining Buddhahood.

The important thing next, in terms of practice, is correct faith. The Daishonin consistently emphasizes faith that embodies the spirit of not begrudging our lives, the willingness to dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to the Law. – *DI, WNDW 27, Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death II*

OUR LIVES ARE adrift in the sea of suffering of life and death, but when we base both our life and death on the Mystic Law, we will be able to cross that sea without fear. The same is true with the phenomenal world of existence and nonexistence. By fixing our minds on the

Mystic Law, we are able to move throughout that world in any way we please. In the final analysis, neither happiness nor good fortune comes to us of itself; we are the ones who must build it.

We can make the law of life and death work for us by harnessing the mystic functions of the life essence. This is still not the same as saying that birth and death will cease, or that we will become immortal, a legendary sage. We will live on as ordinary people, but we will no longer have to repeat a continually more painful cycle of suffering as we go through birth and death. Making the law of life and death work for us means that we can instead find joy, by discovering the essential reality of life and death themselves. Then we can live freely and as happily as a butterfly floating from flower to flower. – *DI, Heritage of the ultimate Law of Life, Selected lectures on the Goshō I*

67 CAN MY FAMILY AND CLOSE FRIENDS BENEFIT FROM MY PRACTICE?

To illustrate, if a family member brings home water from the ocean, the entire family can use it. – *The Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood: WND I, 747*

Be firmly convinced that the benefits from this will extend to your parents, your grandparents, nay, even to countless living beings, not to mention your own husband, whom you hold most dear. – *The Offering of an Unlined Robe: WND I, 533*

FIRST AND FOREMOST, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism exists for the sake of both ourselves and others. It provides a means whereby we can change our own destiny for the better, and up to a certain point, influence the life condition and surroundings of others. Because the Buddhist principle of oneness of the person and their environment is a reality, when we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, quite naturally, people in our personal orbit will be positively affected by it, as well as ourselves. – *Akemi Baynes, Family and Buddhism, Art of Living, Dec 2001*

68 LIFE AND DEATH

No phenomena — either heaven or earth, yin or yang, the sun or the moon, the five planets, or any of the worlds from hell to Buddhahood — are free from the two phases of life and death. —

The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life: *WND I*, 216

Living beings that pass through the two phases of life and death are the entities of the Ten Worlds, or the entities of Myoho-engekyo. — The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life: *WND I*, 216

If you truly fear the sufferings of birth and death and yearn for nirvana, if you carry out your faith and thirst for the way, then the sufferings of change and impermanence will become no more than yesterday's dream, and the awakening of enlightenment will become today's reality. — Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man II: *WND I*, 130

LIFE AND DEATH are the two phases that all living beings must pass through. Conversely, a living being can exist only in the state of life or death. The ordinary person can see his life only as it begins with birth and ends with death. The Buddhist perspective goes beyond this limited view, however, extending its horizon to life as a changeless entity that exists eternally, sometimes in the manifest phase called life, and at other times in the latent phase called death

...

In the Ongi Kuden (his oral teachings of the Lotus Sutra) . . . Nichiren Daishonin says that . . . we should . . . regard birth and death as essential phases in the ultimate entity of life. This, he says, is the only valid view of life. Life is the state in which its ultimate entity is manifest, and death the state in which it lies dormant. The ultimate entity remains unchanged, repeating the endless cycle of birth and death.

Buddhism also teaches us that life and death are one and the same. What allows life to continue is the mystic energy accumulated in its latent state. When the latent form is aroused by some external influence, it becomes manifest once again, giving full expression to its

individuality. Eventually, it quietly recedes into the state of death. However, during this latent state, that being stores up fresh energy in preparation for its coming rebirth. –*DI, Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life, Selected Lectures on the Goshō I*

SENSEI ONCE pointed out in a lecture that the world will never be rid of the three poisons of anger, greed and ignorance or stupidity until people understand that life is eternal. Buddhism's enlightened view of the purpose of life and death brings people to establish a new set of values, which bring about a profound change in their attitudes to life. For example, a businessman who understands that life is eternal and practices to the Gohonzon, will not pursue profit with ruthless greed, perhaps killing himself with overwork and ruining others in the process. He will be no less dynamic but his life will be rhythmic and his efforts will be for the happiness and security of his employees and the satisfaction of his customers as well as himself. – *RC, Risshō Ankoku Ron, UKE Oct 1985*

69 ~ NICHIREN DAISHONIN PASSES AWAY

I have been preaching this doctrine [of the Mystic Law] now for twenty-nine years. Perhaps as a result of physical exhaustion and mental exertion owing to daily debates, monthly persecutions, and two exiles, during the last seven or eight years [here at Minobu] illnesses associated with aging have assailed me yearly. None of them led to a crisis, but from the first month of this year my body has especially weakened and I have the feeling that my life is drawing to a close. Besides, I am already a full sixty years old. Even if I were to manage to live past this year,²⁹ is it likely

²⁹This was written in 1281, the year before the Daishonin's death.

that I could live for one or two more years? – Goshō Zenshū,
1105

NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S life was one of unceasing struggle. In his final years at Mount Minobu, he devoted himself to his writings and to fostering and teaching his disciples . . .

He had already established the Dai-Gohonzon, the true purpose of his appearance in this world, in 1279. In addition, he had trained numerous capable disciples to carry on his teaching, including Nikkō Shōnin (his direct successor and second high priest).

In September 1282, a little more than a month before his death, the Daishōnin left Mount Minobu. His destination was the hot springs at Hitachi (in present-day Ibaraki Prefecture). It is thought that his disciples urged him to go there to take a cure.

But Hitachi was far away, and the long journey over mountains and rivers would surely have been trying for the ailing Daishōnin. Why was it, then, that the Daishōnin decided to embark on this trip?

Nichikān Shōnin (the 26th high priest and great restorer of Nichiren Daishōnin's Buddhism) comments on the striking similarity between Shakyamuni's last journey and activities right before his death and the Daishōnin's departure from Mount Minobu on a trip that ultimately took him to the Ikegami residence, where he passed away. He asserted that there was profound significance in this parallel.

Moreover, throughout his life, the Daishōnin had never hesitated in the face of great obstacles or persecution, proclaiming spiritedly: "So the battle goes on even today" (*WND I*, 392) and "But still I am not discouraged" (*WND I*, 748).

In view of these considerations, it seems to me that the Daishōnin went out of his way to set an example for his disciples, through his own actions, of how they should fight to the very end to establish the correct teaching for the peace of the land and for the entire world. – *DI, speech, SGI Newsletter 6325 (Jan 26, 2005)*

70 SEARCHING FOR MY OWN TRUE STRENGTH

EXPERIENCE:—

KAREN INGMAN, KALK BAY, CAPE TOWN

I LEFT SOUTH AFRICA in 1990, unsure of my destiny, but with an urge to expand my life and to explore other cultures. By 2003, I was living in London, having worked, studied and finally earned a living by doing what I enjoyed. But I had always known I would never settle there for good. And so my journey began, to find a country that I would like to settle in. I worked hard and saved enough money to support myself while on the move.

I started with Spain, then bought a world air-ticket, starting in Cape Town, and going onward to India, Australia, New Zealand, Mexico and back to London.

After a very short time in Cape Town I moved on to India. Three months on, I received a letter from my ex-partner, inviting me to visit him in New Zealand. We had unfinished business. So I spent one year in New Zealand. I was still very unsure and ambivalent about settling there, but nevertheless applied for residency.

While I was in New Zealand I became very involved in SGI activities. I joined the Diamond group, which supports meetings behind the scenes and helped organise activities for people new to this practice, “Victory Over Violence” workshops and Buddhist study meetings, all the while supporting and encouraging other members and new chanters.

The relationship with my partner was very challenging. I had to strengthen my courage and develop compassion. The excellent training that I received through my involvement in the SGI enabled me to expand my life and to gain strength and a stand-alone spirit. However, several times our relationship became so difficult that I wanted to leave New Zealand. But I always chanted about it, and within 24 hours realised that it wasn’t yet the right thing to do. During this time, I became friends with my partner’s *ex*-partner, and introduced her to this Buddhism.

She was very unhappy and I encouraged her to chant to change her

circumstances. This was very challenging for me because they still had unresolved issues between them. However, due to the strength and power I had summoned from my own life, I learned to love him unconditionally, which is a very enduring and beautiful thing. I don't think I had ever loved this way before.

The one Gosho which was my constant support, was The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Daishonin writes:

Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. Regard your survival as wondrous. Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other ... Have profound faith. A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered. – The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra: *WND* I, 1001

I really chanted hard to muster the power of my faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Gohonzon, and my own life. I needed to understand this relationship which was so closely linked with my decision whether to permanently settle in New Zealand.

By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, attending SGI activities and supporting others, I built solid foundations in New Zealand. The deepening of my faith gave me strength, courage and wisdom. In June 2004, I realised that my mission in New Zealand was accomplished. I had finally been able to let go of this man who has been so very important in my life. I felt free and happy about it. I also realised that now I would not settle in New Zealand. I flew out of Auckland feeling relieved and incredibly happy. This happiness was the great benefit that I had created by challenging and overcoming the immense difficulties of living in foreign country in a problematic relationship.

New Zealand lay behind me, but where to now? I was still no closer to finding my new home. I began by visiting my parents in Port Elizabeth and supporting people I had introduced to Buddhism ten months previously.

Although I had considered staying in South Africa, I knew I would not settle in Port Elizabeth. But when I heard that SGI-SA was hosting the Gandhi King Ikeda exhibition in Johannesburg, Cape Town

and Durban, I decided to go to Johannesburg—where I had more friends. But a Cape Town member encouraged me to come go there to help with the exhibition. And in August 2004, I fell in love with Cape Town, the diversity of people, the beauty and the lovely SGI members, and seriously considered settling there.

I first had to sort out things in London, but knew intuitively that I would return to Cape Town. While I was in London, my partner from New Zealand arrived to try to woo me back! So I found myself having to face the same questions again, but although my heart was still drawn to this man, I knew that Cape Town was the right place for me. This time I could make the right choice, based on my wisdom and courage, rather than my feelings for him. I felt I had accomplished a huge victory.

I didn't really have to make a decision, or ponder about moving back to South Africa; it was simply the right thing. I had no doubts about it. The last four months since I returned have not always been easy. I have sometimes felt alone and missed my friends and life in England and New Zealand, but I have never doubted or regretted coming home. Through deepening my faith, I have learnt to trust my life and the Gohonzon, and I know that this is the right place for me to live and to carry out kosen-rufu.

71 WE WIN WHEN THE GOHONZON IS CENTRAL TO OUR LIVES

I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. – Reply to Kyo'o: *WND I*, 412

MR MATSUDA explains the difference concentrated daimoku can make in the following quotation from his lecture:

If you have a problem, worry, heartache, or the like, or if you have a goal or personal pursuit, it may become central to your thoughts. Then, you cannot see it in proper

perspective and you may fail. If, in such cases, you bring the Gohonzon to the core of your thoughts, however, you can discover the most appropriate approach to your particular situation, wisdom welling up from within.

The crucial point is for believers in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to be able to make the great leap required in centralizing the Gohonzon in their lives . . . The vital flow of one's Buddha nature, triggered by the chanting of daimoku, can cut through any type of karma or destiny and change it for the better. When the karma is changed, the problem associated with it will be changed also. It vanishes.

– Prue Bannerji, *Gosho Discussion on Letter to Gijo-bo*:
UKE April 1994

IT IS OUR Buddhahood which “understands” the Gohonzon; and as we chant, it is as if our Buddhahood is ‘reading’ the Gohonzon, in order to realign aspects of our lives, converting negative energy into positive. In this way, we begin to understand our lives more clearly, and gain the power to take a creative approach to situations, rather than continually being dragged down by the same old negative feelings and problems . . .

By regularly chanting to the Gohonzon, we can keep adjusting the course of our life's journey, safely navigating obstacles as they arise. With this confidence, we can actually enjoy the view as we go, not getting too downhearted when faced with a particularly tricky situation, as we know that by using a good map, we have the power to fight on and find greener pastures ahead. – Louise Ellis, *The Gohonzon, Map of the Living Buddha*, UKE Apr 1997,15-6

72 ICHINEN – OUR FUNDAMENTAL ATTITUDE TO LIFE

...if the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds. – On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: *WND I*, 4

WHAT IS IN our “mind”, or at the heart of our lives, is the most important and decisive thing. ‘Mind’ in this sense doesn’t just mean our conscious mind — it means the spiritual aspect of our lives. Another way of expressing it is our fundamental “attitude”. It’s often easy to see how someone else’s attitude to life causes his or her problems, but it can be incredibly hard to see how our own negative attitude is influencing us. Our minds are easily swayed by our circumstances — easily influenced by the poisons of anger, greed and stupidity. Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon to enable us to “observe” our minds. By this he didn’t mean just to see what negative attitudes are causing us to suffer, but to understand the reality of ichinen sanzen in our lives; to see the Buddha nature within us and make it central to our thoughts, words and deeds.

...The ichinen of all Buddhas is to reveal Buddhahood and to enable others to reveal theirs. It is to understand that Buddhahood pervades the entire universe. We should believe in our Buddhahood. That is what believing in the Gohonzon means, since it is the mirror of our Buddhahood. – *Prue Bannerji, Goshō Discussion on Letter to Gijo-bo: UKE April 1994*

73 THE SOLUTION LIES WITHIN – THE SPIRIT OF HUMAN REVOLUTION

Your practice of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of the sufferings of birth and death in the least unless you perceive the true nature of your life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, then your performing even ten thousand practices and ten thousand good deeds will be in vain. It is like the case of a poor man who spends night and day counting his neighbor's wealth but gains not even half a coin. – On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: *WND I*, 3

WE COULD summarize the spirit of this teaching as being, “It’s not up to others; nor can I blame anyone else. I have to change myself first.” It is a viewpoint which says, everything in life is part of our own training; it is for our benefit and development. Human revolution takes place right now, in the situation we find ourselves at this moment.

World peace starts with this inner transformation of the individual. And, yes, it is a struggle to develop and elevate our state of life; but human revolution is the foundation for world peace and also for individual peace and happiness. It is at the heart of our Buddhist practice. It is about changing our heart and drawing out our humanity.

It is the most amazing feeling as you discover that if the cause of your suffering is within the realms of your own life, then you and only you can change that aspect of your life. This is the most freeing feeling. This is human revolution and the door to your Buddhahood.

Human revolution brings into play all the principles and processes that make up the Buddhist teachings of life. Learning to be able to live our lives on the basis of correct teachings is part of our human revolution. The process is a transformation of the heart. – *Human Revolution and Overcoming Obstacles*

74 ~ FROM NICHIREN TILL THE 20TH CENTURY

The Lotus Sutra says: “In that evil age there will be monks with perverse wisdom and hearts that are fawning and crooked who will suppose they have attained what they have not attained, being proud and boastful in heart.” – On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: *WND I*, 11

AFTER NICHIREN’S passing, his closest disciple, Nikko, kept the true spirit of Buddhism alive. For the next six centuries, the Daishonin’s Buddhism was maintained by a relatively small religious group until the early part of the twentieth century. – *The Winning Life*, 37

BEFORE NICHIREN DAISHONIN died in October 1282, he wrote his “Document for entrusting the Law that Nichiren propagated throughout his life,” which named his disciple Nikko Shonin as his legitimate successor.

In 1285, a statue of Shakyamuni was erected at Mount Minobu and one of the six senior priests, Niko (not Nikko Shonin) called this an appropriate object of devotion — going completely against the instructions of Nichiren Daishonin.

In reaction, Nikko Shonin left Mount Minobu in order to protect the purity of his mentor’s teachings, and in 1289 established Taisekiji as the head temple of the Daishonin’s school, at the foot of Mount Fuji. It becomes the center of what comes to be known as the Fuji School, in modern times referred to as Nichiren Shoshu.

In 1333, two priests fought over succession rights, setting in motion a land dispute that lasted 70 years, splitting the head temple into two factions. By this time, four errant schools had branched off from the legitimate Fuji School founded by Nikko Shonin.

In the 1400s, the 9th high priest, Nichiu, managed to unify the three factions at the head temple, which had fallen into decline as a result of the long dispute. But in 1482, a 13-year-old was appointed

high priest, and in order to counter challenges regarding his qualification, the priesthood began for the first time to propound doctrines asserting that the high priest is absolute and infallible. (This idea of priestly infallibility was revived by the current high priest of Nichiren Shoshu to strengthen his own position and power in the 1990s, after its excommunication of SGI.)

In 1718 Nichikan became the 26th high priest. He worked tirelessly to clarify the Daishonin's teachings and the correct practice of them, reestablishing the importance of the Gohonzon and bringing the head temple back on track. (Today, the Gohonzon that SGI members receive is a copy of one transcribed by Nichikan.) – *Adapted from Confirming our Path*

IN JUNE 1943, Soka Gakkai leaders were ordered to the head temple. The Rev. Jikkai Watanabe, on behalf of Nichiren Shoshu, suggested that the Gakkai members receive this Shinto talisman in the meantime and follow the direction of the military for a while. This suggestion was made with the current and retired high priests on hand as witnesses.

Again, Nikko Shonin writes in his "Twenty-Six Admonitions" that we should not follow even the high priest if he takes actions that oppose the teaching of the Daishonin's Buddhism. In this spirit, President Makiguchi resolutely rejected the idea of accepting the Shinto talisman and left the head temple. On the way home, he said to me: "What I lament is not that a sect will be ruined but that our nation will perish." – *Josei Toda: History and conviction of the Soka Gakkai II (August 10, 1951)*

75 ~ MAKIGUCHI FOUNDS THE SOKA GAKKAI

Even if it seems that, because I was born in the ruler's domain,
I follow him in my actions, I will never follow him in my heart. –
The Selection of the Time: *WND I*, 579

TSUNESABURO MAKIGUCHI (1871-1944), an educator in Japan, was passionately dedicated to the reform of the Japanese educational system, which emphasized rote learning over critical independent thinking. He strove to develop modes of education that would unleash the potential of the individual. After studying Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, he realized that they could provide the philosophical underpinnings for the value-creating education that had been his lifetime goal.

In 1928, Mr Makiguchi committed himself to practising this Buddhism along with a young teacher, Josei Toda (1900-58), whom he had met in 1920. In 1930, they founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, or "Value Creation Education Society," as a laypersons' organisation, drawing its membership principally from among fellow educators.

Japan was plunging headlong into war, a course opposed to the Buddhist reverence for life. As WWII progressed, the government redoubled its efforts to crack down on all forms of dissidence. Mr Makiguchi and Mr Toda found themselves under increasing pressure to compromise their beliefs and practise state Shintoism.

Finally, the government asked the high priest of Nichiren Shoshu to accept a Shinto object of worship and enshrine it at the head temple. This would be in direct contradiction with the teachings and spirit of Nichiren Daishonin. The priests, fearful of their own safety and wanting to curry favour with the authorities, accepted this governmental order to protect themselves from persecution.

Mr Makiguchi, however, refused to violate the spirit of the Daishonin's Buddhism. His resistance to the government order led to his and Mr Toda's arrest and imprisonment as "thought criminals" in 1943 along with other Soka Kyoiku Gakkai leaders.

Mr Makiguchi, at 72, endured brutality and privation in prison, refusing on all counts to compromise his convictions. The records of his interrogations reveal a man propounding, without a trace of hesitation or fear, the very thoughts that had led to his incarceration. – *The Winning Life*, 38-9

EVEN IN THE interrogation room, Makiguchi declared: "The emperor is just an ordinary person. When he was crown prince, he attended Gakushin University and gained the learning that would be required

of him to perform his duties as emperor. Nor is the emperor infallible.”

He was explicitly rejecting the notion that the emperor was a living god.

On 18 November 1994, Makiguchi died in prison due to malnutrition and the toll his imprisonment had taken on his aged body. – *DI, NHR3, 270-1*

76 ~ TODA’S EXPERIENCES IN PRISON

The most important thing in practising the Buddha teachings is to follow and uphold the Buddha’s golden words, not the opinions of others. – On practising the Buddha’s teachings: *WND I, 392*

IN 1943, Makiguchi, Toda, and the entire top leadership of the organization were arrested as “thought criminals,” on charges of Is:majest and violating the Public Security Preservation law.

Most of the Society’s remaining leadership recanted their faith to gain release from prison, but Toda did not. During his incarceration, profound spiritual experiences convinced him that Nichiren Buddhism was unassailable in terms of both doctrine and practice, and that he himself had a unique mission to spearhead a new movement of unprecedented scale. Rebuilding and expanding the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai as a means to that end became his ultimate goal. – *Resource Guide*

ON JANUARY 8, 1945, one-and-a-half years after my imprisonment began, I was told Mr. Makiguchi had died recently. When I returned to my cell, I could not stop my tears . . . Just about the time President Makiguchi died, I had almost completed two million daimoku, and I experienced a profoundly mystic life-condition, thanks to the Daishonin’s great compassion. After that, I spent my time in interrogations, chanting daimoku, and feeling the joy of having understood the Lotus Sutra, which had been so difficult at first.

The indignation I felt when I was freed could be understood by no one but the Buddha. The Soka Gakkai was completely destroyed, and the members I came across all had serious doubts about the Gohonzon. They bore a grudge against Mr Makiguchi and hated me. – *History and conviction of the Soka Gakkai I (July 10, 1951)*

77 ~ THE SOKA GAKKAI: TODA BECOMES PRESIDENT

Realise that the time will come when the truth will be revealed that both the person and the Law are unaging and eternal. There cannot be slightest doubt about the sutra's promise of "peace and security in their present existence." – On practising the Buddha's teachings: *WND I*, 392

RELEASED FROM prison in July 1945, bankrupt and with broken health, [Toda] nonetheless began almost immediately to reconstruct the organization.

One of his first steps was to drop "Kyoiku" ("education") from the organization's name. It became simply Soka Gakkai (Value-Creating Society) and definitively shifted its focus from educational reform to the propagation of Nichiren Buddhism. Toda became the organization's second president in 1951.

The Soka Gakkai's membership expanded rapidly in the following years and by 1957, the year before his death, Toda had led the organization from the few thousand members who gathered after the end of World War II to a membership of 750 000 households . . . an astounding growth of more than 250 times in a dozen years. – *Resource Guide*

78 CHANTING – FUELLING THE ENGINES OF OUR LIVES

The Lotus Sutra is a fine sword, but its might depends on the one who wields it. – General Stone Tiger: *WND I*, 953

GONGYO IS a daily activity in which we purify and prime our hearts and minds. It is starting the engine for our day. It's like grooming ourselves before we set out for the day. There are people who have powerful engines and people who have weak engines. The strength of our engine dramatically affects what we accomplish throughout the course of our lives. The difference can be huge. Diligently applying ourselves in our daily practice of gongyo and daimoku boosts the power of our engine.

Gongyo and daimoku represent a ceremony in which our lives commune with the universe. Gongyo is an activity in which, through our faith in the Gohonzon, we vigorously infuse the microcosm of our individual existence with the life force of the macrocosm, of the entire universe. If we do this regularly each morning and evening, our life force—our engine — is strengthened. – *World Tribune, February 20 1998, 1*

79 FAITH MANIFESTS ITSELF IN DAILY LIFE

Miao-lo says, "Wise men can perceive the cause of things, as snakes know the way of snakes." When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, one understands the meaning of all worldly affairs. – *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind: WND I*, 376

BUDDHISM becomes manifest in society. It could be said that Buddhism is the “true entity”, and society (secular matters) “all phenomena”. Similarly, faith is the “true entity” and daily life “all phenomena.” The principle of faith manifesting itself in daily life is thus the principle of the true entity of all phenomena.

There can be no Buddhism divorced from the real world. Nichiren Daishonin, citing T’ien-t’ai’s words, “No affairs of life or work are in any way different from the ultimate reality,” says: “A person of wisdom is not one who practices Buddhism apart from worldly affairs but, rather, one who thoroughly understands the principles by which the world may be governed” (*WND I*, 1121); and “secular matters are the entirety of Buddhism” (*WND I*, 1126). “Ultimately,” here means “just as they are.” In other words, secular matters, just as they are, are Buddhism. Only in the real world can the validity of Buddhism be proven . . .

The sun instantaneously illuminates the earth. Likewise, those who uphold the Mystic Law have to understand secular matters. Faith causes the sun of wisdom — which enables us to clearly see what we need to do in order to win — to rise in our hearts.

One of the Buddha’s 10 honorable titles is “Understanding of the World.” The Buddha profoundly understands all secular affairs. — *DI, Lectures on the “Expedient Means” Chapter, 153-4: SGI-USA, 1995*

80 THE SUN RISING OVER SOUTH AFRICA

EXPERIENCE:—

LOREN BRAITHWAITE, JOHANNESBURG

TEN YEARS ago I moved from New York to South Africa and began a new chapter in my life. At that time I had been practicing Nichiren Buddhism for 12 years and had experienced many incredible transformations in my life. I had begun my practice as a penniless person in trouble with the law. Before I left the United States I had become a corporate attorney in one of the most prestigious law firms in New York.

I had just married a wonderful man and we decided to start a family together. Then, in a moment that life washed away.

On July 3, 1993 — nine short months after our wedding day — my beloved husband Hamid and I went to a seaside vacation home to join my sister and her family for the holiday weekend. My husband drowned when we were both overtaken by a wave that washed us far from the shore. I couldn't believe the pain of that moment and the ensuing years of trying to live with his untimely death. I was plunged into despair and was absolutely convinced that I would never again experience happiness.

That following September, I was fortunate to receive personal encouragement from Yumiko Hachiya, Soka Gakkai International (SGI) Senior Director, who was accompanying SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's visit to the United States.

She explained that, although I was suffering so much at this time, that as long as I continued my faith, my prayers would definitely be answered — even though it could possibly take up to 10 years.

I have always cherished this guidance and marked the 10-year anniversary of my husband's death as an important point to reflect on my life.

The day before Hamid's death I had been involved with the launch of the South African Free Elections Fund. This fund was established to provide funding for voter education projects in South Africa's first democratic elections. I had been one of its organizers and we were fortunate to have President Nelson Mandela attend the first meeting of our Board of Directors.

Soon after receiving the guidance from Mrs Hachiya, I was offered the opportunity to move to South Africa to allocate the funds that were raised to help prepare for the elections. We eventually funded 52 voter education preparation programs that reached over 13 million people, disbursing over \$7,5-million.

One of the largest projects we initiated was an effort to ensure that all eligible voters were able to participate in the election. There was a tremendous backlog of processing the requirements for voter registration, which we knew would result in people being shut out of the election. In a few short weeks we were able to train a staff of over 4

000 that were deployed to register voters. This task force issued an estimated 3,5-million temporary voter cards, which represented 18% of the total electorate, who would otherwise have been disenfranchised.

Once the elections were over, however, I wanted nothing more than to die as soon as possible. I felt like I had completed my mission and the pain of living without my husband was just too much to endure.

Fortunately, soon after the election, one of my former clients offered me an exciting opportunity. While an attorney in New York, I had been very involved in the anti-apartheid movement.

I was asked to be one of the founding members of the first black investment bank in South Africa, even though I had no experience as an investment banker. Surprisingly, even though this company was greatly aligned with the ruling party of the new government, I, an American, was chosen to head up the public sector unit, the bank's interface with government ministers and departments.

We were very involved in advancing the concepts of employee share-ownership programs in South Africa as well as broad share-ownership programs, enabling large numbers of people to become investors and owners of the "new" South African economy.

I decided next to focus on empowering women in South Africa, since it became increasingly clear that black women in particular were not proportionately being given the chance to participate in the new economic upsurge. I began a women's investment company called Pontso Investments. (Pontso means "vision" in Sesotho). We began this company by inviting 10 of some of the most powerful women in the country to join our board of directors. Soon we were in the headlines with announcements of our acquisitions in the financial services and telecommunications industries. However, our success was short-lived. One of these powerful women forced me out of my position as the managing director of the company I had begun.

This was very painful for me, as it was a very public affront and I had to carefully pursue my next direction. I determined to chant to the Gohonzon for seven days straight, seven hours a day. While I chanted I read over and over again President Ikeda's guidance, "If you lose courage and become base and servile, you will be trampled upon by

evil authorities, no matter what country you live in or where you are. If you allow this to happen, you will be pressurizing your own self. I really want you to do away with all this pressure. Do away with this cowardly nature. I want you to lead the most satisfying, liberated and eternal life—a life that is comparable with the life of the universe.” Through these focused prayers, I realized that I wanted to embark on a new career path.

When I was working at the investment bank I had been appointed as the advisor to the Minister of Communications on the advancement of economic empowerment in the Telecommunications industry. I decided to prove the truth of my advice myself by going into this industry.

Throughout this time, I had also been very involved in the growth and development of SGI- South Africa. When I arrived in the country in 1993, there were only about 50 practising SGI members in the country and many were still very new in faith and understanding. I had been appointed the Young Women’s Division leader of SGI South Africa until I graduated to the women’s division in 1998 and then was one of the national leaders responsible for the development of the organization. Every year we would conduct a national SGI training course to which all members were invited to participate.

On the last day of the national course in 2000 I received an offer from a former business colleague to take over a majority stake in one of his companies and to devise a new strategy for taking the company forward. I immediately accepted and have been, for the past three years, the CEO of Mergent Technologies, a company that builds telecommunications infrastructure. Since I joined the company, revenues have increased by 1 400%. What began as a small company with only five employees has now grown to over 35 permanent employees. On our last major project we employed over three thousand contractors and currently have projects in 12 countries throughout the continent, with offices in Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique, as well as in South Africa.

SGI South Africa is also growing by leaps and bounds. We now have over 350 members with the largest membership in Johannesburg. In 2001 we were registered as an affiliate SGI organization in

South Africa and I was named the General Director. That same year we officially opened our SGI-SA Community Centre in a beautiful neighbourhood in Johannesburg on an acre of property.

Also, in 2002, the SGI, in cooperation with the Earth Council, presented an exhibition at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, entitled, “A Quiet Revolution – The Earth Charter and Human Potential.” Over 15 000 guests visited the exhibition, including South African President Thabo Mbeki, First Lady Mrs. Zanele Mbeki, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, UN Under-Secretary General Anwarul K. Chowdhury and Princess Irene of the Netherlands. The exhibition won third prize at Ubuntu Village in the “Independent Exhibits” category. From a small struggling organization, the members of SGI South Africa felt that they had crossed a magnificent threshold, to have designed, built and hosted an exhibition of this magnitude.

Now, 10 years later, I can report that I am certainly happier in my life than I had thought possible. I have overcome the shadow that my husband’s death cast over my life and have been able to build a life of great fortune. I am certain that if not for his untimely death, I would not have moved to South Africa, which clearly has become my mission.

The opportunity to lead the SGI organization in South Africa is my great honor and challenge and it is certainly more than I ever could have imagined 10 years ago. Today I have a thriving business in telecommunications, where I am able to make an impact on South African society in many ways. I also have very strong friendships and I am surrounded by people whom I respect and love. Ten years ago, I could think of nothing but hoping to die as soon as possible. Today, I have such a deep sense of appreciation for my life. I know the truth of President Ikeda’s words: “If our faith is weak, poison remains poison within us. But if our faith is strong, any poison, no matter how virulent, will be transformed into beneficial medicine. Therefore I hope all of you will have utmost confidence. The greater our misery, the happier we will become. The one who suffers the most will be happiest in the end. Such are the workings of the Mystic law. Such is the immense power of the unfathomable Law of Life” (Guidance

Today, 343).

I know that this great change is due to my practice of Nichiren Buddhism, my connection with and being part of the SGI family and President Ikeda's wonderful guidance and words of wisdom throughout these years.

Experiencing the death of my husband exposed me to the deepest sense of pain and despair that I can imagine. I believe that because of this intense suffering I have been able to become more compassionate and sympathetic with others, giving me a greater capacity to embrace the lives of the members. This pain could have remained a poison in my life — but the SGI and President Ikeda's leadership have taught me to transform this poison into medicine. I believe that my most conspicuous benefit is the treasure inside my heart in seeing the growth and development of SGI-SA even in the face of tumultuous change and difficult circumstances.

I can truly say that my life thus far has been a thrilling, exciting, and fulfilling drama because I practice this Buddhism. I have been able to pull myself up out of many difficult and even tragic situations and win with the confidence that I have the ability to tap the power of the universe. President Ikeda has proclaimed Africa as the Continent of the 21st century and I am determined to deeply understand his vision. Africa is a broad and vast landscape, containing the deepest roots as the birthplace of humankind. As this is now my place of mission, I will continue expanding my life, my wisdom and my courage to meet this challenge.

81 THOSE WHO CHANT THE DAIMOKU ARE THE TREASURE TOWER

In the Latter Day of the Law, no treasure tower exists other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra. It follows, therefore, that whether eminent or humble, high or low, those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are themselves

the treasure tower, and, likewise, are themselves the Thus Come One Many Treasures. – On the Treasure Tower: *WND I*, 299

HOW DO YOU really describe a human life? Not by the surface features: how a person looks, what she sounds like or how he acts. But by how precious the life itself is . . . In Buddhism, the Treasure Tower serves as metaphor for the inherent value of human life, the life of the Buddha.

[The Treasure Tower] reaches more than 2,000 miles high with “numberless streamers”, “ten thousand million jewelled bells”, gold, silver and other treasure adorning its surface. With its “five thousand railings” and “thousand, ten thousand rooms”, it is really hard to imagine. Which, of course, is the point.

This Treasure Tower, appearing in the Lotus Sutra’s 11th chapter, is meant to be grand, awesome and unfathomable because that is how Buddhism views human life. The logic-defying description confused most people over the centuries, who often dismissed it as mere hyperbole [exaggeration]. The genius of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, then, is its explanation of the fantastic image as human life itself. “Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself,” he writes to his disciple Abutsu-bo. “No other knowledge is purposeful.” (*WND I*, 299).

This interpretation clarifies the Treasure Tower and its relevance today. One of society’s greatest problems is people’s lack of respect for life, both their own and others.

Not realizing the treasure within themselves, many feel their lives are without purpose. And a lack of reverence for the lives of others leads to discrimination, violence and war. The Daishonin’s illumination of the Treasure Tower reveals to us just how precious both our lives and the lives of others are: full of wonder, vast, eternal. – *Dave McNeill, World Tribune Mar 16, 2001, 2*

82 ~ PRESIDENT IKEDA AND THE SGI

It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong. Our contemporary scholars of the various schools are just like them. They despise a wise man without power, but fear evil rulers. They are no more than fawning retainers. Only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove one's real strength. When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teachings tries to destroy the correct teaching and do away with a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood.

– Letter from Sado: *WND I*, 302

DAISAKU IKEDA, Toda's leading disciple, was inaugurated as the third president of the Soka Gakkai in 1960 at age 32. He held this post until 1979, when he became honorary president of the Soka Gakkai in Japan. He became president of the Soka Gakkai International, formed in 1975 as an association linking the many national organizations around the world, and continues to serve in that capacity, communicating the spirit and practice of Nichiren Buddhism in modern terms.

Two notable trends have marked the era of Ikeda's leadership. The first is the continued growth of the organization, which currently numbers approximately 12 million individuals, with more than a million practicing in countries other than Japan.

Within a few months of his inauguration in 1960, Ikeda traveled abroad, something Toda had never been able to do. He formed the first overseas chapter in the United States, where a few immigrants, primarily the Japanese wives of American servicemen, were struggling to maintain their practice. Current membership in the United States is about 300 000. The large majority is non-Japanese; indeed, the ethnic makeup of the membership is highly diverse. As Clark Strand writes in the Winter 2003 issue of *Tricycle: The Buddhist Quarterly*: "Soka Gakkai has attracted real diversity among its membership, and no other American Buddhist group has . . . Racial diversity is in some sense the birthright of the Soka Gakkai because of its origins in the prophetic, socially engaged Buddhism of Nichiren, and ultimately because of the Lotus Sutra itself, which posits the fundamental equality of all beings." The organization has grown similarly in other countries.

The second notable trend under Ikeda's leadership has been the "opening up" of the organization—the development of working relationships worldwide with individuals and organizations on issues of global concern. This cooperation falls into three broad, overlapping categories: peace, culture and education. — *Resource Guide*

83 ~ THE SGI IS EXPELLED BY NICHIREN SHOSHU

If even a good monk sees someone destroying the teaching and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him or to punish him for his offense, then you should realize that that monk is betraying the Buddha's teaching — On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: *WND I*, 17

Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views. — The Twenty-Six Admonitions of Nikko: *Gosho Zenshu*, 1618

JUST AS IN OTHER religions with strong lay organizations, conflict and tension existed between the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and the SGI. A defining event occurred in November 1991, when the high priest of Nichiren Shoshu excommunicated the entire lay association of the SGI, effectively banning the 12 million SGI members from participation in religious activities sponsored by the sect. The clergy also refused to allow new members of the SGI to receive the Gohonzon, which is central to the religious practice instituted by Nichiren.

Although the causes for this separation are complex, and the context colored by Japanese history as well as by traditions within the Nichiren Shoshu sect, the conflict stems from the priesthood's claim that the lay organization must submit to the absolute authority of the high priest and, further, to the superiority of the priesthood as interpreter of Nichiren's teachings.

In his book on the development of the SGI in Britain, sociologist Bryan Wilson offers this brief commentary on the situation:

The priesthood was a conservative body, small, secluded, and with horizons narrowly circumscribed by centuries of Japanese insulation from the external world. SGI was a movement of revitalization, adapted to modern conditions, pursuing from the outset a policy of expansive growth, and quickly acquiring an international clientele and orientation. The priesthood was characteristically authoritarian, status conscious, and hierarchic; the lay organization was populist, egalitarian, and unwilling to concede the sort of status differences, which were endemic in conceptions of priesthood.

The SGI maintains that Nichiren recognized no distinction in capacity or faith between priests and lay persons, and that his fundamental intent was to encourage all people who sincerely seek to follow his teaching. As a result, there seems to be a permanent rupture between the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood — they operate as fully independent entities.

Given this reality, the SGI independently began to issue the Gohonzon to its members in late 1993. The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood insists that the SGI has no right to disseminate or interpret Nichiren Buddhism or provide the means for individuals to take up their practice of Buddhism, while the SGI continues its worldwide efforts to inform people about this faith and to promote mutual respect and understanding among individuals and communities.

– *Resource Guide*

THE CONTROVERSY between the members of the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood that flared up in 1990 is a case in point. In its essence a struggle against the perils of religious authoritarianism, it embodies a movement for religious reform that is at its heart the struggle of humanism against anti-humanism. Hiding behind their assumed authority as priests, the Nichiren Shoshu establishment sought to blind others to their corruption and degradation, and to crush and

oppress the spirits of lay believers. This indeed represents the worst form of anti-humanism.

For the members of the SGI, to have allowed ourselves to be cowed and defeated by this would have been to surrender our humanity. The implications of this controversy go beyond the scope of a single school of Buddhism. Rooted in the universal spirit of human dignity — that which we feel to be human — we believe it would be a disservice to humanity if we were to retreat on this issue.

When the priesthood issue first arose, the educator Taro Hori³⁰ offered this analysis: “This represents a challenge to the authoritarianism and supplicant faith lurking in each person’s heart. By overcoming this, each member [of the SGI] will grow and develop to an astonishing degree” (trans.).

In the years since this issue first surfaced, through our struggles against corrupt religious authority, members of the SGI have, both as individuals and as an organization, outgrown the restraints of our past selves, strengthening and tempering the hearts of the courageous. It is something of which I believe we can be justly proud. This pride stems from the confidence that our struggle ties into the larger challenge — inherent in the nature of civilization itself — of constructing a genuine and robust humanism. – *DI, 2005 Peace Proposal*

84 HON’NIN MYO – STARTING AFRESH RIGHT NOW

Be diligent in developing your faith until the last moment of your life. Otherwise you will have regrets. For example, the journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital? – Letter to Niike: *WND I, 1027*

THOSE OF US who practice the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin have the opportunity to reaffirm our determinations at the begin-

³⁰Taro Hori (1920-95) was then president of Newton College, Shiga.

ning of each day, reciting passages from the Lotus Sutra and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Whatever the past has contained, each day is an opportunity to reaffirm afresh, to make new efforts, to continue to push forward. It is in this sense that each day offers the opportunity to make a great new beginning.

In his second lecture on the Hoben and Juryo chapters of the Lotus Sutra, Daisaku Ikeda explored the phrase “that time”, referring to the crucial importance of our determined prayer. He quotes Goethe: “The moment alone is decisive; fixes the life of man, and his future destiny settles.” President Ikeda continues, “That time” is the moment you resolve from the depths of your heart: “now I will stand up and fight!” From that instant your destiny changes. Your life develops. History begins. This is the spirit of the mystic principle of the True Cause (hon’ nin myo).

... Often, when we make a great determination for a movement forward, all those things within our lives and environment that impede our progress towards our goal become more apparent than they were before. At such times it can seem that we are going backwards rather than going forwards. However, this is just the time not to be swayed from pushing forward. Furthermore, it is often just before we are about to achieve our goals that things can become the most difficult — we experience in our lives the reality that the darkest hour is just before dawn.

When we are experiencing the darkest hour as our reality, we may doubt that the dawn will ever come. That is the very time when we must remember the spirit of the mystic principle of the True Cause — the spirit of ‘starting from now’. — *Ricky Baynes, Starting from now, UKE Sep 1995, 11*

85 HOW TO BECOME A BUDDHA

Becoming a Buddha is nothing extraordinary. If you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with your whole heart, you will naturally become endowed with the Buddha’s thirty-two features and eighty

characteristics. As the sutra says, "hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us,"³¹ you can readily become as noble a Buddha as Shakyamuni. A bird's egg contains nothing but liquid, yet by itself this develops into a beak, two eyes, and all the other parts, and the bird soars into the sky. We, too, are the eggs of ignorance, which are pitiful things, but when nurtured by the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which is like the warmth of the mother bird, we develop the beak of the thirty-two features and the feathers of the eighty characteristics and are free to soar into the sky of the true aspect of all phenomena and the reality of all things. — Letter to Niike: *WND I*, 1030

IN THIS PASSAGE, Nichiren declares that Buddhahood is in fact inherent in the lives of all ordinary people. The role of the Buddha is not that of a supernatural being to which others are subservient.

By stating that "attaining Buddhahood is nothing extraordinary," he indicates that, remarkable as it may seem, we are originally endowed with the potential to do so. He uses the analogy of an egg to illustrate this fact. An egg is a common object, unremarkable on the surface and containing nothing but a sort of gooey liquid. Yet it has the potential to develop into a bird that can fly freely in the sky.

Our lives are just like this. Outwardly we may be common mortals, yet we are naturally endowed with the potential to develop the state of absolute freedom of Buddhahood.

Although the Lotus Sutra attests to the existence of our Buddha nature, Nichiren Daishonin gave us the method to develop it by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. In doing so, the Daishonin says we can develop the Buddha's thirty-two distinguishing features. These are interpreted to be compassion, insight, wisdom and other human qualities, and not as physical attributes that set the Buddha apart from other people. The ultimate reality of life lies nowhere apart from ourselves. We attain Buddhahood in our present form.

Even though we possess the potential for the supreme state of Buddhahood, unless we encounter the proper external relationship —

³¹Lotus Sutra, Chapter 2.

the object of devotion, the Gohonzon — we remain “in the shell of ignorance, lacking the beak of wisdom.”

The role or function of the Gohonzon as the embodiment of Nichiren’s Buddha nature, is to “crack the shell” or furnish the proper external cause by which we can bring forth our innate Gohonzon or Buddha nature. – *Dave Baldschun, SGI-USA Study Department, The Buddha Nature Is Inherent In All People*

86 TAKE ANOTHER STEP FORWARD, EVEN WHEN IT’S HARD

A passage from the Lotus Sutra reads that it is “the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand.”³² Many hear about and accept this sutra, but when great obstacles arise, just as they were told would happen, few remember it and bear it firmly in mind. To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who uphold this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties. It is certain, however, that they will “quickly attain the unsurpassed Buddha way.”³³ To “continue” means to cherish Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the most important principle for all the Buddhas of the three existences.
– The Difficulty of Sustaining Faith: *WND I*, 471

IN THE COURSE of our practice, we encounter various obstacles and hardships. Being a Buddhist does not mean to be immune to life’s ups and downs; rather, it means having a powerful tool to awaken our supreme potential of Buddhahood and overcome our obstacles.

When we mistake the goal of our Buddhist practice as having no obstacles, it will be easy to get confused and discouraged by the realities of conflicts and challenges. For this reason, it is important to understand the true goal of Buddhist practice as a dynamic process of

³²Lotus Sutra, Chapter 10.

³³Lotus Sutra, Chapter 11.

developing the state of life in which we can overcome any obstacle through courage, wisdom and compassion.

In one sense, we are constantly reaching for the summit of our Buddhist practice since the attainment of Buddhahood is not a static condition we attain once and for all. With each step forward, our Buddhahood becomes stronger, more deeply rooted in our lives. So what is most important is to “continue” as the Daishonin says.

We will always have some challenges with or without our Buddhist practice. But as we continue to practice Buddhism and build our inner strength, we develop confidence that our lives will be ultimately secure no matter what may happen; we enjoy each moment while working for the happiness of others. – *Shin Yatomi, Living Buddhism, September 2000, 6 (partly based on Yasashii Kyogaku Easy Buddhist Study: Seikyo Press 1994*

87 TREASURING DIVERSITY

Cherry, plum, peach and damson blossoms all have their own qualities, and they manifest the three properties of the life of the original Buddha without changing their own character. – Goshō Zenshu, 784

BUDDHISM expounds the fundamental equality of all people, but this is not an equality that forces all people to be the same. It is a concept of equality where each person is seen as offering something beautiful and meaningful to the world. This is expressed in the concepts of “attaining enlightenment as we are” and “cherry, plum, peach and damson” — a metaphor for the unique beauty of each individual. The blossoms of the cherry, plum, peach and damson each have their own distinct and exquisite appeal. These concepts convey that the unique features of each person — whether cultural background, gender, sexual identity or their individual interests and tastes—make us the valuable and precious people that we are. – *Ken Saragosa, Freedom and Diversity, SGI-USA website*

ACCORDING TO Buddhism, each individual is a unique manifestation of the ultimate truth. Because each of us manifests this truth in the form of our particular, individual character, each of us is a precious and indeed indispensable aspect of the living cosmos . . .

In Nichiren Buddhism, enlightenment is not a matter of changing ourselves into something which we are not. Rather, it is a matter of bringing forth those positive qualities we already possess. More precisely, it is developing the wisdom and vitality to ensure that the unique characteristics that form our personality serve to create value (happiness) for ourselves and for others . . .

The key here is the belief that each person is a unique manifestation of a universal life force. As such, each person is seen to possess infinite possibility and inherent, inviolable dignity and worth. Yet, compared with the supreme, universal treasure of life we all share, distinctions of gender, ethnicity, cultural or religious background, etc., are of only limited significance. As this understanding takes root, we can learn to overcome excessive attachment to differences and related feelings of aversion or fear.

Just as each individual has a unique character, a unique experience of life, each culture can be understood as a manifestation of cosmic creativity and wisdom. In the same way that Buddhism rejects any hierarchical ranking of individual humans, it adopts an attitude of fundamental respect toward all cultures and traditions.

The principle of adapting the precepts to the locality³⁴ reflects this. The practitioners of Buddhism are encouraged to take a flexible, open approach to the cultural context in which they find themselves. Thus, as they uphold the Buddhist principles of respecting the inherent dignity and sanctity of human life, they follow local customs and practices except when they are directly contrary to those core principles.

Accordingly, SGI organizations worldwide work to develop the kinds of activities that will be most appropriate to their cultural setting and will make the most lasting contribution to their respective societies.

The original purpose of Buddhism is to awaken people to the infi-

³⁴The Japanese word for this concept is *zuiho bini*.

nite value of their own lives and, by extension, of the lives of others. Ultimately, our ability to respond creatively to diversity hinges on our ability to develop a palpable sense of the preciousness of life itself, and of each individual expression of life. – *SGI International website*

88 BUDDHISM IS WIN OR LOSE

This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law. – The Opening of the Eyes II: *WND I*, 280

LEADERS FROM throughout the vast Kanto area are here with us today. Which prefectures are represented here today? [Representatives from each prefecture in Kanto stood up and said their prefecture’s name.] I would like to bestow awards on these representatives, in commemoration of the Soka Gakkai’s 75th anniversary this year. [The SGI leader personally presented members with various awards, including the Soka University of America Honorary Ambassador Award.]

President Toda also gave the following guidance: “Once we have embarked on a challenge, we must win. Please never forget for a moment that the sole driving force for success in all things is thoroughly chanting daimoku and earnestly praying to the Gohonzon.” Because we have followed this guidance to the letter, the Soka Gakkai has developed into the successful organization that it is around the world today.

Let’s always continue to advance together, with our prayers and actions directed toward achieving absolute victory. I’m counting on you! – *DI, speech at 46th HQ leaders meeting, SGI Newsletter 6353*

89 OUR LIVES PERMEATE AND CONTAIN THE UNIVERSE

The Great Teacher Miao-lo says: “You should understand that one’s life and its environment at a single moment encompass the three thousand realms. Therefore, when one attains the Buddha way, one puts oneself in accord with this fundamental principle, and one’s body and mind at a single moment pervade the entire realm of phenomena.” (*WND I*, 366, *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*)

PRESIDENT IKEDA has said:

In the Threefold Secret Teachings, the question is posed: How can the life-moment, which is infinitesimally short, contain three thousand worlds? The answer given is this: “Three Thousand Possible Worlds in Every Life-moment has two meanings according to the Lotus Sutra: ‘to contain’ and ‘to permeate’.

The entire universe is contained in each life at every moment of its existence. Conversely, each life-moment continually permeates the entire universe. The life-moment is a particle of dust holding the elements of all worlds in the universe. It is a drop of water whose essence differs in no way from the vast ocean itself. (Daisaku Ikeda, *Life: An Enigma, A Precious Jewel*, 165)”

Our lives contain the vastness of the universe. Specifically, “to contain” means that we inherently possess the supreme, universal life-condition called Buddhahood . . .

Our lives permeate the universe. Therefore, the condition of our lives — what is in our hearts and minds — is crucial . . . Buddhism teaches that the power of our lives can permeate the universe and change our environment for the better.

“To permeate” and “to contain” encourage us to reflect on the state of our heart: What is our frame of mind? Is it strong or weak? Is it empowered or lifeless? Is it expanding or shrinking? Is it pure or impure? These are crucial questions for us as Buddhists. Soka of Soka Gakkai means “value creation”.

The Buddhist way of life is characterized by ceaseless effort to improve our state of life — to lead a valuable and worthwhile existence. — *Ted Morino, Learning from the Principle of Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life, SGI-USA Study Department*

WE SEE THAT the principle of ichinen sanzen reveals the moment-by-moment interaction between the phenomenal world and the ultimate reality of life. It teaches also that all phenomena, without exception, exist within each moment of an individual’s life, and that every such life-moment therefore contains infinite potential.

The Daishonin’s point is that the individual’s ichinen — the individual’s life at each moment — simultaneously permeates the entire universe and encompasses within itself all the laws and phenomena of the universe. It is, therefore, literally coextensive with the universe.

This relationship between the microcosm of human life and the macrocosm of the universe is mysterious — and marvelous. — *SGI-USA website*

90 UNDERSTANDING THE GREATNESS OF THE PEOPLE

EXPERIENCE:—

KYOKO KIMURA, CLOVELLY, CAPE TOWN

I WAS BORN into a Buddhist family in Japan. I started chanting when I was less than six years old and started doing daily practice of reciting the Lotus Sutra with my parents and three brothers when I was seven years old. I used to loathe doing this because it used to take such a long time and we had to be kneeling down all the time. Compared to my brothers, I was not a very spontaneous Buddhist. Despite that, I used to love attending meetings and listening to everyone’s experience of overcoming illness or financial difficulty or

succeeding in getting a promotion or passing most difficult exam etc. Although I was a child, I always felt that this Buddhism gives a sense of hope to people who are suffering. It is a religion which is alive and powerful. But it all depends on how serious and sincere you are. At that time, I was not very serious and was rather afraid of testing my faith.

For a long time, I had had an impression that my family was poor. We did not have a car and my parents even begrudged money spending on bus. If it was within one hour of walking distance, we walked. No new clothes, no cold drinks, no birthday party, no nothing for luxury. On the other hand, we once had six cats, two dogs and a chicken at the same time, which were all picked up in streets. We used to take turns to collect waste material from a butcher and fishery every day for our pets. We were very odd in a sprawling community where every household was bursting with every newly invented technology and boasting of their newly acquired possessions. Naturally, I was teased and bullied at school for being “poor” and “dirty”. It was very traumatic for me but I could never take it out on my parents. After all they also did not buy anything for themselves. Whatever sweets he was given at work, my father would bring it home and give it to us to share. I turned to shoplifting and binge-eating for a while.

When I was a teenager, this perception that we were poor started changing fast. My parents sent me to Soka High School and Soka Women’s Junior College. My eldest brother went to Soka University³⁵ and went to study at universities in Thailand as an exchange student. My second older brother went to a private university and passed an entrance exam to become a diplomat. My younger brother went to study at a university in America. I realised that my parents had kept every cent for our education so that we could become capable people who could contribute towards world peace.

A lot of my dreams came true, thanks to my parents’ prayers for my happiness. I graduated from a college and after working one year, I went to study English in England. After that I got into Kent Uni-

³⁵The Soka schools and university were established by President Ikeda and the Soka Gakkai. Based on principles of humanistic education, they are open to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

versity to study African Studies. During that time, I met a Japanese lady who inspired me to come to South Africa. In 1992, I moved to Johannesburg on my study permit. I got a job as a coordinator for a Japanese NGO. Then, I became a single mother with a daughter, though soon got married to my present husband, Jonathan, whose work is also about improving society. We had a son together and shortly after moved to the most wonderful house in the most beautiful place on earth, Cape Town. I felt very fortunate, but during this time I realised that my Buddhist practice was becoming more formalistic and I felt I was not getting enough joy out of it.

With encouragement from reading Sensei's guidance and directly from my father, I started chanting more seriously for the happiness of South African people and joy in my life. Shortly after that, I had an opportunity to introduce this Buddhism to someone who lives in Khayelitsha. He liked chanting, so I started going to Khayelitsha to teach him how to chant and I noticed that immediately I was feeling very joyful. He was my first South African friend with whom I could not communicate so well in English. I had a basic knowledge of Zulu language, which is very similar to Xhosa, so I started conversing with him and his friends in a sort of Xhosa.

The township where Zaza lives is an informal settlement and does not have toilets and water in individual houses. Having lived in SA for 14 years, I have seen many different townships but this area is one of the worse-off ones and the fact that it is actually in Cape Town really highlights how brutal our society is. Even after almost ten years of democracy and with a population of — who knows, 10 000 people? — their area is not even in a map book. I felt so angry inside that the poor are ignored and neglected in this supposedly civilised and beautiful city. On the other hand, every time I went and visited the township I felt very happy and humbled by their strength and warmth.

A few weeks later he started chanting. But contrary to my expectation that his life would just take off, he was getting more and more ill from TB. With lots of chanting I recommended him to take a HIV test. A few days later, he confessed to me that his result was positive. I had known that there were millions of people who were HIV positive even around me but he was the first person who confessed

his own status to me. Although I felt devastated for him, I felt honoured knowing he trusted me. I determined to support him through his difficulties.

Soon afterwards on a visit to Khayelitsha, I realised that he was on the verge of dying. I took him home and my husband immediately took him to hospital. During his stay in hospital for a month, I chanted about one to two hours a day and visited him frequently. I was so impressed with his patience and moved by his friends, who also came to visit him every Friday to share their wages. When he finally came out of the hospital, things went well with his health and job situations and suddenly there were lots of his friends and families who were interested in coming to our Buddhist meetings. Many people were amazed by the way he recovered quickly from such a bad condition.

I told him everything I know about HIV and encouraged him to disclose his status to his family and friends. He was very straightforward and open. Soon, other friends started talking about HIV more openly. I accompanied another person's HIV test and counselling, and other friends have also started talking to me about other intimate issues. Sometimes I am surprised to find how little information is actually filtering through to people in our society despite all the front-page news. Although, I am not a counsellor or expert, I feel very strongly that common people like us with a deep friendship can do wonders as a catalyst to changing a grim HIV/AIDS situation in South Africa.

Many more things have happened in my practice last year thanks to the contact with Khayelitsha members. Often it was a death-life situation and made me chant a lot just for me to have strength to give some sort of encouragement to the members. At times it was hard but in hindsight, I am so grateful to have had these amazing challenges. Despite certain disappointments and frustrations from time to time, these experiences have deepened my respect and love for the people, who may be uneducated, unemployed and not always respected in our society.

Recently, I had a strong recollection of an experience sitting in a car with Nelson Mandela and a friend who took me to Madiba's house for lunch in 1993. We were driving through Hillbrow in his chauffeured car. Madiba was looking out the windows and gazing

upon a crowd of people crossing the road. His deeply compassionate gaze made me feel that he was really a great leader. But in my flashback, suddenly I realised that it was because the people were so great that he could not help looking at them with respect. It is because he knows this as a fact that he is so great a leader.

Nichiren Daishonin says that being poor means a lack of understanding of the Mystic Law.³⁶ That is to say, being poor does not mean a low GDP per capita, or homelessness. It means a lack of philosophy and humanity. I wish that everyone in the world would realise this and look at African people with fresh eyes. Why not? The African century has already begun.

91 TEN WORLDS I – BUDDHAHOOD IN A MOMENT

In the phrase “perfect endowment,” endowment refers to the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, while perfect means that, since there is mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, then any one world contains all the other worlds, indicating that this is “perfect.” – The Opening of the Eyes I: *WND I*, 250

THE theory of the ten worlds forms part of Buddhism’s profound description of how life works from moment to moment. The ten worlds are: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood. They are referred to as “worlds” because the early Buddhist sutras taught that they were actual physical locations. In contrast, the Lotus Sutra explains that they describe the internal, subjective experience of individuals. They are, therefore, often known as “life-states” . . .

Although each of us habitually reveals one or more life-state in preference to the others, we all have the potential to reveal any of the ten worlds at any given time.

³⁶The Law of Life, which resonates throughout the universe, and with which we harmonize — mysteriously, amazingly — our lives through chanting.

The four worlds from Learning to Buddhahood are called “higher worlds” because we manifest these only when we have made a conscious effort. The six “lower worlds” emerge instinctively in response to external influences. Every world contains all ten worlds within itself so it is possible for any one of these to remerge at any moment. This is referred to as the “mutual possession” of the ten worlds. For example, a person who has a strong tendency to respond to the world in a state of Anger can also experience Rapture, given the appropriate stimulus . . .

Attaining Buddhahood does not mean experiencing this world to the exclusion of all other. The Lotus Sutra explains the mutual possession of the ten worlds, which indicates that when our fundamental life-state is Buddhahood, we reveal the positive side of the other nine worlds . . .

When we chant daily, we reinforce our potential to reveal Buddhahood and, consequently, the best qualities of the other nine worlds. This is how we transform the destructive aspects of ourselves and live a genuinely creative, humane life. – *Ziggy Mazzarella, UKE April 1997, 6-8*

92 THE TEN WORLDS II

– BREAKING FREE

Question:How am I to believe in the Ten Worlds? Answer: When we look from time to time at a person’s face, we find him or her sometimes joyful, sometimes enraged, and sometimes calm. At times greed appears in the person’s face, at times foolishness, and at times perversity. Rage is the world of hell, greed is that of hungry spirits, foolishness is that of animals, perversity is that of asuras, joy is that of heaven, and calmness is that of human beings. These worlds, the six paths, are all present in the physical appearance of the person’s face. The remaining four noble worlds are hidden and dormant and do not appear in the face,

but if we search carefully, we can tell that they are there. – The
Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind: *WND I*, p. 358

THE expression “Ten Worlds” describes potential states of life, or categories/realms of being, experienced in every human life. They range from the lowest — hell, hungry spirits, animals and asuras (literally, belligerent demons) — through human beings (tranquility), heavenly beings (rapture), voice-hearers (learning) and cause-awakened ones (realization), to bodhisattvas and, ultimately, Buddhas (enlightenment). Not moods we pass through, they are patterns that tend to dominate one’s entire existence. Although each person tends toward one particular state more than any other, whatever one’s life-condition at a given moment, it can instantly fall into a lower state or rise to a higher one. The aim of Nichiren Buddhism is to establish and maintain the predominance of the state of Buddhahood.

The states of hell through heavenly beings are commonly known as the “six paths,” because they are the worlds through which unenlightened beings transmigrate. Hell, for example, is a realm of utter anguish and misery, where rage is very often manifested in self-destructiveness and where there seems to be no possibility of positive interaction with the external world. The rapturous state of heavenly beings, on the other hand, might be characterized by someone who has had some personal desire fulfilled. In each of these cases, as in all of the “six paths,” one is unable to recognize the transitory and illusory nature of one’s perceptions . . .

The course of one’s life is neither fixed nor preordained, although it is clearly influenced by the causes one has made from the infinite past. These Buddhist concepts suggest that instead of feeling trapped in any given life situation, one can break free of those restrictive circumstances. Because of the inseparability of one’s inner, subjective life and the external, objective world, through Buddhist practice it is possible to positively transform one’s life and environment and create happiness for oneself and others. Nichiren’s teachings aimed to enable all human beings to do precisely this. – *The Soka Gakkai International: Religious Roots, Early History and Contemporary Development, 2004* by Soka Gakkai International-USA, 11

93 THE TEN WORLDS III – STRIVING EVER HIGHER

The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles are present in the human world? Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the bodhisattva world within him. Buddhahood is the most difficult to demonstrate. But since you possess the other nine worlds, you should believe that you have Buddhahood as well. Do not permit yourself to have doubts. Expounding on the human world, the Lotus Sutra says, “The Buddhas wish to open the door of Buddha wisdom to all living beings.” The Nirvana Sutra states, “Those who study the teachings of the great vehicle, though they have the eyes of ordinary beings, are said to have the eyes of the Buddha.” That ordinary people born in the latter age can believe in the Lotus Sutra is due to the fact that the world of Buddhahood is present in the human world. – The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind: *WND I*, 358

THE four higher realms — of learning, realization, bodhisattva and Buddhahood—are also known as the “four noble worlds.” They have in common an effort first to understand, then to transform, oneself and one’s environment. In the worlds of learning and realization, people make an effort to grasp the deeper reality of their own existences and the lasting truth within life. In so doing, they begin to perceive the causes of suffering and work to transform that suffering into the basis for personal growth. While in the world of learning, one strives for self-development by learning from the ideas, knowledge and experience of others. In the world of realization, insight begins to emerge through one’s own contemplative interaction with the surrounding world based on an understanding of causality.

While people in the latter two states are primarily concerned with their own development, those in the higher, altruistic realm of bodhisattvas pursue enlightenment while devoting themselves to compas-

sionate acts for the sake of others. Buddhahood, the highest realm, is characterized by boundless compassion, wisdom, joy and the courage and strength to surmount all hardships in order to help others attain this state. It is important to note that this highest life-state is not at all separate from the other nine. Rather, it manifests itself wholly in the other nine, and functions to transform and harmonize them, making them all the means to compassionate understanding and action rather than potential obstacles to it. – *The Soka Gakkai International: Religious Roots, Early History and Contemporary Development, 2004* by Soka Gakkai International-USA, 11

94 CHALLENGING FUNDAMENTAL DARKNESS

The great lantern that illuminates the long night of the sufferings of birth and death, the sharp sword that severs the fundamental darkness inherent in life, is none other than the Lotus Sutra. – A Comparison of the Lotus and Other Sutras: *WND I, 1038*

ALL lives are equally precious. Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings especially value the equality and sanctity of life: he declared that everyone possesses the potential for Buddhahood, a life of absolute happiness and the power to lead others to happiness as well . . .

Our lives are also imbued with what Buddhism calls “fundamental darkness”, deep-seated human delusion that prevents us from seeing the Buddha nature in all life. This delusion provokes us into taking advantage of others for our own selfish ends.

Just as we cannot attain genuine happiness without overcoming obstacles, we cannot unveil our enlightenment without facing this fundamental darkness. We practice Buddhism to do just that, to win the struggle between enlightenment and delusion, to defeat our fundamental darkness and to protect human dignity.

Fundamental darkness often manifests itself in authoritarian tendencies. When we try to bend others to our will, we are not respecting

their inherent Buddha nature. Conversely, when we bow in obeisance to others, we aren't respecting ourselves.

Everyone has both positive and negative aspects, so while it is important to resist those who try to exert control over us, we must also reflect on our own negative tendencies. The Lotus Sutra describes religious leaders who succumb to fundamental darkness and misuse their influence as “despising and looking down on all humankind” (*The Lotus Sutra*, 193).

... Genuine tolerance for people is based on steadfast intolerance of any disrespect for life. But to challenge those “despising and looking down on all humankind” we need honest and courageous self-reflection, because we possess the same tendencies, no matter how latent. Only through challenging the fundamental darkness both in ourselves and in corrupt authorities can we truly reveal our innate Buddhahood. – *The Journey Begins*, 35-38

95 BUDDHIST UNITY II

THE inseparability of fish and the water in which they swim is an expression of the freedom we enjoy, when we consciously strive to transcend differences. A fish has the potential to swim throughout all the oceans which cover 70% of the world's surface. That kind of freedom must also be an expression of enormous joy. A person who continually emphasizes differences experiences the opposite effect. Disrespect of fellow human beings brings an ever-increasing restriction of space in which the individual feels comfortable. Such a person is like a fish confined in a goldfish bowl, starved of freedom and the shared joy and experiences of its fellows. These two different approaches to life could be seen as the difference between Buddhahood and hell.

A person who transcends differences [simultaneously] achieves kosen-rufu. Kosen-rufu, or world peace, is not some mythical far away concept but a living reality, which we can achieve from moment to moment. As always, Buddhism is very simple. By transcending differences and establishing itai doshin one attains Buddhahood and

itai doshin all in one.

As Buddhists, we are responsible for our own happiness. Buddhahood is a state of life which is attainable like all the other life states, but different in its qualities and happiness. An event or person may be the cause of suffering, but it is the extent to which we can use our Buddhahood in these situations which determines our happiness, growth and enlightenment.

So how do we transcend the differences and achieve itai doshin? The starting point has to be absolute determination, or *ichinen*. The next step is dialogue. It is always easier to talk to a third party about how badly we've been treated, rather than talking to the person directly. It takes great courage to talk directly to the person concerned, but if you are serious about achieving itai doshin, this is often the best way. If you can't even bear to talk to each other you can always chant together.

Transcending differences does not mean you have to agree with the person concerned, or sanction what they do which upsets you. This would completely deny the importance of itai. Ultimately, the desire to get beyond the feeling that someone is wrong, helps you find the way. – *Peter Morris, UKE Feb. 1999*

96 BUDDHIST UNITY III

SOME people may say that if they are doing their best in faith, practice and study then surely they are naturally achieving itai doshin. We can check this by asking some questions. Is there anyone in your family you disrespect? Are there people at work who you would not even give the time of day? If there are, there is still a bit to do.

It is easy to believe that we are good Buddhists, but instead of creating itai doshin we still emphasize differences. If we read the *Gosho*, "The Three Kinds of Treasure" we find that even *Shijo Kingo* with his strong faith had a problem with this. *Kingo* had separated himself from his four brothers, even though they were all strong followers of the *Daishonin*. They must have done something that *Shijo* disapproved of and he just could not bring himself to transcend the

differences.

Nichiren Daishonin explains to Shijo Kingo that his life depends on repairing that relationship, teaching him that people are our treasures of the heart and that this is the greatest treasure of all.

Perhaps we can start to see the importance of this principle. Itai doshin is the bedrock of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and transcending differences is the bedrock of kosen-rufu.

Doshin, one mind, also means overcoming delusion. Delusion arises from viewing things from an egotistical, narrow perspective. The way to overcome the small ego and transcend differences is study and inspiration. Inspiration must flow through our movement like the blood which floods through our bodies, bringing fresh oxygen and removing waste products. – *Peter Morris, UKE Feb. 1999*

97 BUDDHIST UNITY IV

IT is very human to want to be praised for the great efforts that we make. To give clear explanations and admit when we are wrong are essential aspects of being human.

There are many examples in history, ancient and new, of how horrific disasters have been the catalyst for benefit and change. When people unite, transcending their differences, they can create something beautiful from the ashes of devastation. It is the same with our own lives. Sufferings are the fuel of our strength, happiness, enlightenment and growth.

President Ikeda:

Nichiren Daishonin often equates the function of rain with problems and difficulties which are vital to human beings to make us grow and to make us strong. Being ignored, or even treated badly, is in fact benefit, because it trains you to endure and being able to endure is in itself happiness. When you develop the power to endure, you will develop a state of life which cannot be suppressed by anything.

Good fortune and happiness come from respecting life. Misfortune and unhappiness come from disrespecting life. This holds true for an individual, a group, a country or the world. It is therefore only natural that any country which does not respect the dignity of life will experience all kinds of misfortune. To live respecting life is a fundamental part of being a Buddhist.

In a world full of ethnic conflict and division we must be living proof of itai doshin: where we achieve itai doshin within our families and communities; where we make our workplaces lands of kosen-rufu. In this great mission, we are all totally equal and just as important as each other. Together we can create a peaceful world. – *Peter Morris, UKE Feb. 1999*

98 WHY RECITE THE EXPEDIENT MEANS CHAPTER IN GONGYO?

As for what sort of doctrines are taught in this wonderful Lotus Sutra, beginning with the "Expedient Means" chapter in the first volume, it teaches that bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, and ordinary people are all capable of attaining Buddhahood. –
The Sutra of True Requit: *WND I*, 930

THE spirit of the Expedient Means (*Hoben*) chapter³⁷, as expressed in these passages, is a profound form of humanistic education. The reason for this is that Buddhism starts from the recognition of each person's infinite potential. And it teaches the means whereby people can awaken to, and draw forth, the supreme treasure of Buddhahood in their lives.

When people become aware of this treasure in their own lives, they also come to recognize it in others, and so will treat their fellow human beings with heartfelt respect. At the same time, they naturally take action to spark the same awareness in others.

³⁷This is the 2nd chapter of the Lotus Sutra, an excerpt from which is the first part of Gongyo, and called the Hobenpon.

When we make such efforts, the treasure in our own lives is polished, and this in turn enables us to develop still more confidence in our innate potential and dignity. Buddhist practice is thus the path of limitless self-improvement. – *DI, Lectures on the Hoben and Juryo Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*

99 WHY RECITE THE LIFE SPAN CHAPTER OF THE LOTUS SUTRA?

The Lotus Sutra represents the bone and marrow of all the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime, and the verse section of the Life Span chapter represents the soul of the twenty-eight chapters of the sutra. The various Buddhas of the three existences look upon the Life Span chapter as their very life, and the bodhisattvas of the ten directions likewise regard the chapter's verse section as their eye. – Letter to Horen: *WND I*, 516

THE Lotus Sutra is the scripture that enables all people to become happy. Specifically, it is in the Life Span chapter that Shakyamuni reveals the great law that can lead all people in the world to happiness after his passing. This is the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo implicit in the depths of the Life Span chapter.

The Daishonin says: “In the Latter Day of the Law, the provisional and theoretical teachings cannot help people overcome the sufferings of life and death. The Life Span chapter of the essential teaching alone is the vital teaching that enables them to do so” (Gosho Zenshu, 1022).

Even within the Lotus Sutra, the teaching that can save the people of the Latter Day of the Law may be found only in the Life Span chapter. Overcoming the sufferings of life and death means gaining liberation from the fundamental sufferings of existence. This is the teaching that enables people to develop a state of happiness arising from the very depths of their being. The Life Span chapter elucidates the “eternal life” from which all lives fundamentally spring.

What benefit may be gained from hearing the Life Span chapter expounded? In the Distinctions in Benefits (17th) chapter we find the passage, “Hearing that the Buddha’s life is immeasurable, all beings are filled with joy” (Lotus Sutra 17, 237). In other words, understanding life’s eternity fills people with joy from the depths of their being. This joy is the power of the Mystic Law that can dispel any suffering, no matter how deep-seated. Needless to say, this refers to the benefit of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo hidden in the chapter’s depths; Nichiren Daishonin says, “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys” (Gosho Zenshu, 788).

President Toda described the inner state of those who embrace the Gohonzon, saying, “From the depths of their lives they feel total peace of mind, and to live is itself a joy.”

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the great law that fundamentally illuminates the lives of all people. It is the great beneficial medicine that can fundamentally save all people of the Latter Day who are steeped in the sufferings of life and death. – *DI, Lectures on the Hoben and Juryo Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*

100 THE CORRECT TEACHING FOR THE PEACE OF THE LAND II

There can be no doubt that all people, from the ruler on down to the general populace, rejoice in and desire the stability of the nation and the peace of the world. – On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: *WND I, 23*

THE Daishonin always made the happiness of the people his top priority. If one’s actions are based on the Lotus Sutra, which teaches the enlightenment of all living beings, people inevitable become one’s primary focus. . .

If we accept this people-centered perspective as the Daishonin’s point of departure and the foundation of his concept of “peace of the

land,” then the logical result of establishing the “peace of the land” is world peace. For making the land peaceful means realizing peace.

In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching”, the Daishonin warns of the two disasters of internal strife and foreign invasion. In other words, he warns of the danger of the outbreak of war.

War is not only cruel, miserable, and ugly, it is the manifestation of the most hideous and wretched functions of human life. It is a devilish act that strips people of the nobility and dignity of life, that strips them of everything it is to be human. Ending war is the natural mission of Buddhism, which aims to protect the sanctity of life and seeks to lead all people to the supreme life-state of Buddhahood.

It is the lot of people living in the Latter Day of the Law to be swept along from one conflict to the next as if caught in a raging torrent. The only way to stop this cycle is for people to bring forth their own Buddha nature. Therefore, manifesting the world of Buddhahood is the most fundamental path to peace. The Daishonin was engaged in a struggle to make this a sure and eternal path for all. – *DI, WND IW5, Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land II*

101 THE CORRECT TEACHING FOR THE PEACE OF THE LAND III

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. — On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: *WND I*, 25

HERE, the Daishonin is teaching the fundamental level at which the principle of “establishing the correct teaching” takes place. That is, it occurs on the level of the heart. In other words, without a transformation in the inner life of the individual, the correct teaching cannot be established.

The Daishonin says that when we win over the fundamental evil of slander of the Law and transform the beliefs that we hold in our heart, then the threefold world — the actual world in which we live — becomes a pure Buddha land, an indestructible treasure realm. He also says that the teaching in which we should believe is the “single good doctrine”. “Doctrine” means a true teaching and refers namely to the Lotus Sutra. “Single good” means fundamental good.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that all people can manifest the Buddha nature, and that it is the duty of those who uphold the Sutra to take action to enable others to attain Buddhahood as well. This is the wisdom and way of life of the Buddha. This philosophy and practice of the Buddha is precisely what is meant by fundamental good. In the same vein, the Daishonin’s teaching of the Three Great Secret Laws is none other than the practice of fundamental good for the Latter Day of the Law.

At any rate, those who embrace this philosophy and dedicate their lives to putting it into practice are equal to the Buddha in their spirit and way of life. And the place they dwell, wherever it may be, is a Buddha land. From this we see that the Law of Buddhism is the fundamental underpinning of people’s lives.

The essence of “establishing the correct teaching” lies in believing in the fundamental good that is the Lotus Sutra and in each individual establishing peace in their hearts. Only when a society that functions in accord with the fundamental good is firmly secured will a truly

peaceful society be actualized. This does not mean, however, that every person in a given society must be united by faith in the Lotus Sutra. What matters is that the spirit of the great philosophy of peace expounded in the Lotus Sutra, with its teaching that all people are Buddhas, be given full play in society as a whole. On a societal level, "establishing the correct teaching" means establishing the concepts of human dignity and the sanctity of life as principles that support and move society. – *DI, WND IW4, Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land I*

102 THE CORRECT TEACHING FOR THE PEACE OF THE LAND IV

If we look about, we find that the sun and moon continue to move in their accustomed orbits, and the five planets follow the proper course. The three treasures of Buddhism continue to exist, and the period of a hundred reigns has not yet expired. Then why is it that the world has already fallen into decline and that the laws of the state have come to an end? What is wrong? What error has been committed? – *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land: WND I, 6-7*

WE live in a world filled with the three poisons of anger, greed and ignorance. In our materialistic, consumer society the environment plays on people's desires — fame, fortune, glamour, riches, sex — causing people to plunge down the wrong path. This applies not only to people but to whole nations. For example, the UK has followed the lead of the USA in making nuclear weapons and in such trends as drug abuse. People today need, above all things, the solid rock of a great philosophy of life, a master who can teach it and a practice powerful enough for them to adhere to it "no matter what"

...

By practising Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we activate our Buddha nature and develop the perception to see beneath the surface

of life and make correct judgments between good and evil. – *RC, The importance of the Rissho Ankoku Ron*³⁸ today, *UKE Oct 1985*

103 WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A BUDDHIST BECOMES ILL?

The Buddha has already been called a skilled physician, and the Law has been likened to good medicine and all living beings to people suffering from illness. – Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man II: *WND I*, 133

Your illness is surely not due to karma, but even if it were, you could rely on the power of the Lotus Sutra to cure it. – The Bow and Arrow: *WND I*, 656

FIRST, BUDDHISM views sickness as something inherent in life and therefore unavoidable. It is part of the cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death. Yet Buddhism urges us to awaken to the fact that illness is not something permanent in life — it is a temporary phenomenon — and that it can be a meaningful event in one’s eternal life.

When we fall ill, we tend to see the current sickness as the only thing that matters, and therefore we can become its slave, perceiving it as an immovable wall or foreboding obstacle separating us from happiness. Some people who are ill may even lose the will to live out their existence joyfully.

However, when we realize that becoming ill is only a natural phase of our lives — and that it can be an opportunity to build an even more solid foundation of happiness in ourselves — then, we can tap the courageous spirit to face the illness and battle it, as Nichiren Daishonin states, “Illness gives rise to the resolve to attain the way.” (*WND I*, 937).

Therefore, the important thing when it comes to this problem is to have strong will to triumph over the “devil of sickness.” This is the

³⁸Jap. name of the Goshō, The Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land

faith with which you can say to yourself: “I will defeat my sickness! I will change poison into medicine!”

In other words, often times, sickness itself is not the real problem. If we are defeated in our life-condition by sickness, that is the problem.

SGI President Ikeda says: “In life, you may, by rights, become sick from time to time. However, as you practice to the Gohonzon, you will come to realize that you are now sick because being sick now is the most natural thing for your life at this moment. In other words, you can consider your sickness to be the sickness of hon’nu [a natural illness that accords with the rhythm of the Law]. Put another way, if your life-condition remains healthy through the practice of faith, you will never be swayed by your sickness. You will never fall into painful agony due to your illness. Rather, as you go through your current sickness, you will find your true self or absolute happiness solidifying.” – *Ted Morino, SGI-USA Study Department Chief, Some Questions and Answers about Buddhism*

104 CROSSING THE SEA OF SUFFERING

One who listens to even a sentence or phrase of the sutra and cherishes it deep in one’s heart may be likened to a ship that crosses the sea of the sufferings of birth and death. The Great Teacher Miao-lo stated, “Even a single phrase cherished deep in one’s heart will without fail help one reach the opposite shore. To ponder one phrase and practice it is to exercise navigation.” Only the ship of Myoho-enge-kyo enables one to cross the sea of the sufferings of birth and death. – *A Ship to Cross the Sea of Suffering: WND I, 33*

TO BE RESOLVED to believe in and chant to the Gohonzon is to be endowed with the power to fully utilize the law of life and death. Our lives are adrift in the sea of suffering of life and death, but when we base both our life and death on the Mystic Law, we will be able

to cross that sea without fear. The same is true with the phenomenal world of existence and non-existence. By fixing our minds on the Mystic Law, we are able to move throughout that world in any way we please. In the final analysis, neither happiness nor good fortune comes to us of itself; we are the ones who must build it. – *DI, Selected Lectures on the Goshō I*

105 LIBERATING OURSELVES FROM THE SHACKLES OF OUR PAST

It is for this reason that the sutra states, “If there are those who hear the Law, then not a one will fail to attain Buddhahood.” This passage means that, if there are a hundred or a thousand people who uphold this sutra, without a single exception all one hundred or one thousand of them will become Buddhas. – Wu-lung and I-lung: *WND I*, 1099

W E GAIN ACCESS to the “treasure” of our Buddhahood every time we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, as the Daishonin expresses in the Goshō, Wu-Lung and I-Lung.

This means that we do not have to be dependent on good fortune accumulated in the past in order to attain Buddhahood, nor need we be restricted by any negative actions we may have taken. We ‘start afresh’ with every daimoku that we chant. We can be confident that we are making the highest possible cause when we chant, because we are sowing the seeds of Buddhahood. As SGI President Ikeda has said:

It (the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin) enables the pure life-force of the Buddha state, which has existed within us since time without beginning, to well forth in unceasing currents. It changes all the tragic causes and effects that lie between and unveils the pure causes and effects which exist from the beginningless past towards

the present and future. This is liberation from the heavy shackles of destiny we have carried from the past. This is the establishment of free individuals in the truest sense of the term.

– *Jiggy Mazzarella, UKE Dec 1995, 10*

106 WE COMMON MORTALS ARE BUDDHAS

Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpas ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another. – *The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life: WND I, 216*

It is, however, extremely difficult to convince you that Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, exists within us [just as the other nine worlds do]. Therefore, he gives us this admonishment beforehand: "Among the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach, this Lotus Sutra is the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand. – *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind Established in the Fifth Five-Hundred-Year Period after the Thus Come One's Passing: WND I, 363*

The Shakyamuni Buddha within our lives is the eternal Buddha since time without beginning, who obtained the three bodies more than numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago. – *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind: WND I, 365*

BUDDHISM teaches us that there is no difference between the common mortal and the Buddha, only that the common mortal is deluded, or ignorant of the existence of the Buddha state inherent in our life. Elsewhere the Daishonin writes, "The mystic principle that is the essential nature of phenomena possesses two aspects, the defiled aspect and the pure aspect. If the defiled aspect is operative, this is

called delusion. If the pure aspect is operative, this is called enlightenment. Enlightenment constitutes the realm of Buddhahood. Delusion constitutes the realm of ordinary mortals. (*WND I*, 417)”

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the confidence that we will reveal this state is the practice which will turn delusion into enlightenment. If we think we are weak or hopeless or evil we are not giving the pure aspect of our lives the opportunity to become manifest. Putting our fears and negativity to one side or on hold allows us the space to praise our inherent Buddhahood, and then find the wisdom and compassion to know what correct action to take; this is how to deal with the ignorance of our minds. – *Robert Harrap, Art of Living Sept 2003, 9*

JUST AS THERE are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves, so there is no essential difference between a Buddha and a common mortal ... One way or another, our religious upbringing, our own sense of imperfection or ultimately, Buddhism would say, our fundamental delusion causes us to think that the state of Buddhahood is completely separate from what we are at present. Here, however, the Daishonin clearly asserts that the only difference is one of life-condition: A Buddha is a human being who has awakened to the truth that his or her own life is the Mystic Law, while a common mortal is one who has not. In a lecture on the Goshō, The True Entity of Life, SGI President Ikeda clarifies this point:

All religions in the past regarded God or Buddha as a sacred, superhuman being—human dignity was recognized only as long as the individual was enveloped in God’s grace or the Buddha’s mercy ... I believe that Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism—the religion that teaches that humans themselves are the entity of the Mystic Law and as such are innately endowed with ultimate sanctity—can provide a clear-cut answer to the questions humanity asks itself.

– *DI, Goshō Study on ‘On Attaining Buddhahood’ I: SGI-USA website*

107 LIMITLESS SELF-IMPROVEMENT

When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. – On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: *WND I, 4*

BUDDHISM STARTS from the recognition of each person's infinite potential. And it teaches the means whereby people can awaken to, and draw forth, the supreme treasure of Buddhahood in their lives.

When people become aware of this treasure in their own lives, they also come to recognize it in others, and so will treat their fellow human beings with heartfelt respect. At the same time, they naturally take action to spark the same awareness in others.

When we make such efforts, the treasure in our own lives is polished, and this in turn enables us to develop still more confidence in our innate potential and dignity. Buddhist practice is thus the path of limitless self-improvement. – *DI, Conversations & Lectures on the Lotus Sutra I, 162*

108 DO WE HAVE TO UNDERSTAND NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO?

The Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, is known as a sutra that was preached in accordance with the Buddha's own mind. Because the Buddha's mind is an excellent mind, persons who read this

sutra, even though they may not understand its meaning, will gain inestimable benefit. – The Bodies and Minds of Ordinary Beings: *WND I*, 1128

AN INFANT drinks and benefits from its mother’s milk, but does so without knowing the milk’s composition. The same principle is at work when we chant daimoku and recite the liturgy of gongyo.

Naturally, it’s all the better if we come to understand the meaning; but this is only because it can help strengthen our confidence in the Mystic Law. But if such understanding is not accompanied by practice, then it is ultimately meaningless.

It is difficult to grasp fully the profound meaning of the Mystic Law through purely theoretical means.

Looking at the animal kingdom, each species has its own unique means of communication or “language”. We humans cannot understand it, but birds, for example, clearly understand the language of other birds, and dogs, of other dogs.

In the same way, our voices chanting daimoku and reciting the sutra during gongyo are communicated to the Gohonzon, and unerringly understood in the realm of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. You might say that when we do gongyo and chant daimoku, we are speaking the language of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

So even if you don’t understand the literal meaning of what you are saying, your voices while doing gongyo and chanting daimoku to the Gohonzon reach all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Buddhist gods throughout time and space—the protective functions within life and the universe. And unseen, the entire universe will be activated toward fulfilling your prayers. –*DI, SGI Newsletter 3435*

109 DO THE WORDS ‘NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO’ HAVE INTRINSIC POWER?

Everything has its essential point, and the heart of the Lotus Sutra is its title, or the daimoku, of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Truly,

if you chant this in the morning and evening, you are correctly reading the entire Lotus Sutra. (*WND I*, 923, The One Essential Phrase)

All words have power. Words can make people happy or sad, angry or loving, and so on. Language has a more profound effect on our lives than we realize. Nichiren Daishonin says: "They say that ...if you so much as hear the words 'pickled plum', your mouth will begin to water. Even in everyday life there are such wonders, so how much greater are the wonders of the Lotus Sutra!" – The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra: *WND I*, 141

HISTORICALLY, Myoho-enge-kyo is the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra, the highest of Shakyamuni's teachings, as translated from Sanskrit into ancient Chinese characters. Nichiren Daishonin placed *nam*, a Sanskrit word meaning 'devotion', in front of these characters; so that in simple terms Nam-myoho-enge-kyo means devotion to the ultimate Law of the universe. Each of the characters themselves contain extremely profound principles of life, however, and together they express how everything in the cosmos works in one harmonious relationship . . .

Scientists and mathematicians use formulas and language which are quite incomprehensible to most other people, but they can convey even the most difficult concepts to each other with accurate use of these expressions. Daisaku Ikeda says: "In the same manner, when we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, even if we don't understand its profound meaning, we can tap the condition of Buddhahood.

"Our voice chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo permeates the cosmos and reaches the life condition of Buddhahood and all the Buddhas in the universe. It also penetrates our lives, enabling us to unlock the palace of Buddhahood, or the supreme life condition of eternity, happiness, true self and purity. It is the same as music that, without any explanation, reaches and filters into people's hearts, calling forth a sympathetic response from them."

The most important point to remember is that everyone who chants Nam-myoho-enge-kyo can draw out of themselves the state of Buddhahood which influences all the other states in our life and guides our actions in the very midst of our day-to-day struggles and

problems. Although it is very difficult to believe at first, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essence of everyone's life, and when we chant this phrase it affects us in countless positive ways, from the very core of our lives.

The extent to which we can benefit from chanting depends not on the power inherent in the characters Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which is limitless, but entirely on how much sincere effort we make when we practice. The natural Law of life is in everything, but only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and taking action in our daily lives can we tap or activate it, and so enable it to work for the happiness of ourselves and other people.

Buddhism talks about the principle of the 'four powers': the power of the Buddha, the power of the Law, the power of faith and the power of practice. The first two are embodied in the Gohonzon, but are only activated by the powers of faith and practice of the person who chants to it. In other words it is the power of our faith and practice which determines the extent to which the power of the Gohonzon can appear in our lives. – *Questions and Answers for Beginners: www.sgi-usa.org*

110 THE TEN WORLDS – ALL PEOPLE CAN BECOME BUDDHAS

In the final analysis, this Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law sums up all the teachings and meditational practices of Shakyamuni Buddha's entire lifetime in a single moment of life, and encompasses all the living beings of the Ten Worlds and their environments in the three thousand realms. – A Sage and an Unenlightened Man: *WND I*, 116

SHAKYAMUNI Buddha taught that "everyone can achieve enlightenment by his own efforts". So Buddhahood can be fulfilled by one's own will, as, for instance, in the form of Bodhisattva vows

and practices. Thus the practices are of an independent and self-determined nature, so here is yet another egalitarian element.

In addition, according status to priests is not regarded as a condition of enlightenment in the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. Even less do we encounter discrimination in the form of differences between priests and laymen. A concept that would differentiate people in a spiritual hierarchy does not agree with the modern theory of human rights.

The concept of Buddhahood, however, does not refer to a mechanistic idea of equality, where all men are equal or should be equal. Neither does the fulfilment of Buddhahood mean that we cease being human. We live within and among the realities of life, and this real and concrete life is appreciated as valuable. According to T'ien-t'ai (see day 48), this life can be categorized into ten states. These are, listed from the lowest state of life to the higher ones:

1. the state of hell
2. the state of hunger
3. the state of animality
4. the state of anger
5. the state of tranquility
6. the state of rapture
7. the state of learning
8. the state of partial enlightenment
9. the state of the Bodhisattva
10. the state of the Buddha

The first six states are often seen in daily life. They point to the tendency of our life to be urged on by desires and continually alternate between joy and suffering. The significance of this insight into the ten states of life is that the ordinary person, who is mainly characterized

by the nine lower states of life, is nevertheless not separated from the highest state—that of the Buddha. Due to their potential of the Buddha-state, they can even transform their desires, which otherwise account for the cause of suffering, into the quality of enlightenment.

Thus, the so-called Buddha is not understood as some heavenly being who exists beyond the realities of daily life, but as the quality of Buddha or Buddhahood, immanent within all humans. This is why we can, through our Buddhist practice, develop this quality as wisdom, in order to enhance our conflict-ridden daily life with meaning, depth and richness.

The development of Buddhahood manifests itself quite differently, according to individual physical and spiritual qualities and various states of life. This is why the concept of Buddhahood cannot imply a simple mechanistic equality, but must recognize the development of the possibilities inherent within each individual. The principle known as “immanent transcendence” states that every person, though maintaining his concrete physical form, is nevertheless, in his character as a Buddha, elevated above the secular world . . .

The concept of Buddha-hood provides for respect towards all human beings, since they are all equipped with it. Developing a new human rights theory based on this perspective could prove meaningful and valuable. – *Toru Shiotsu (member of the research group of the Institute for Oriental Philosophy), Mahayana Buddhist Contributions to the Issue of Human Rights, Soka University Tokyo*

111 ATTAINING ENLIGHTENMENT IN THIS LIFETIME

It is the same with a Buddha and an ordinary being. When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror,

but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. – On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime: *WND I*, 4

WITH THE ANALOGY of the mirror, Nichiren Daishonin clarifies what it is that keeps us, as common mortals, from realizing that we have the potential for Buddhahood. It is called “fundamental delusion” or “the darkness innate in life” and ultimately means ignorance of the Buddha nature. Like tarnish on a mirror, it prevents us from perceiving that our own lives embody the Mystic Law. According to Buddhism, this delusion is a fundamental source of suffering.

Because we are ignorant of the inherent dignity of our lives, we often act in ways that degrades it and consequently bring pain to ourselves and others. How much anguish could be eliminated from the world if only we were deeply convinced of our own Buddha nature! Never again could we be ruled by feelings of hopeless inadequacy, fear or guilt. Never again could we fundamentally despise ourselves or imagine that our own worth could be threatened, let alone defined, by circumstances. Moreover, as the Daishonin goes on to say in the concluding paragraph of this Goshō: “Once you realize that your own life is the Mystic Law, you will realize that so are the lives of all others.”

If we truly understood that everyone we meet is ultimately a Buddha, we could never take pleasure in another’s suffering or think that we could be happy at their expense. The more deeply we are convinced that we and everyone else are entities of the Mystic Law, the less we will tend to hurt or belittle ourselves and others, and the more we will be prompted toward considerate and humane conduct.

In urging us to “polish your mirror, night and day”, the Daishonin teaches us to continue our practice so that we may dispel the fundamental darkness innate in life and allow the light of our inherent Buddha nature to shine forth. In the very act of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we are, at that moment, in the state of Buddhahood. But when we finish chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and go do something

else, we revert to the nine worlds of daily life. However, by continuing to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, day by day and month after month, we gradually establish Buddhahood as our fundamental tendency in life.

Upon this basis, all the other nine worlds begin to function in an enlightened way, working to benefit both ourselves and others. This process of establishing Buddhahood as our basic life-condition constitutes “attaining enlightenment in this lifetime”. Or, from another perspective, we can say that continuing to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo throughout life is in itself an enlightened way to live. – *DI, Goshō Study on ‘On Attaining Buddhahood’ I: SGI-USA website*

112 HUMANISM AND THE BUDDHA

At what time, what moment, should we ever allow ourselves to forget the compassionate vow of the Buddha, who declared, “At all times I think to myself: [How can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha]?” – Questions and Answers about Embracing the Lotus Sutra: *WND I*, 62

OBSERVING society today, we see that most people have lost sight of their inherent dignity and, swayed by instinctive impulses and desires, grow increasingly self-centred. They prey upon one another, and often their hatreds and prejudices are barely concealed. Buddhism teaches that this ugly aspect of human beings stems from the “three poisons” of greed, anger and stupidity. Unfortunately, these three poisons, like the Buddha nature, are inherent in human life. I think that it is because we have given these poisons free reign that we have brought about the present distorted condition of our civilisation: we exploit nature for our own ends, manipulate other people selfishly, and sacrifice the future for the present.

As well as spotlighting this evil aspect of human nature, the wisdom of Buddhism teaches that, when we develop the Buddha nature

in the depths of our lives, we can control the workings of the three poisons and transform them into an influence for good. In short, from the Buddhist point of view, human dignity is not something static. It requires constant effort to challenge our evil side firmly and overcome it. Both the teaching and the practice of Buddhism enable one to reform and improve one's life in this way. The practice is called the action of "human revolution", or the development of Buddha nature.

I believe that the human revolution, based on the emergence of one's inherent Buddha nature, can arise only from Buddhist practice. Reforming the depths of our lives is rather like enriching the soil. The kind of crop we plant and cultivate in the depths of our beings will bear fruit in our concrete actions in daily life and in our society. Since, as we have seen, all life is united, then all life will be improved by our individual enrichment.

So our goal of human revolution cannot be achieved in a realm isolated from actual society, but is possible only through the interaction of our repeated efforts in both our religious practice and our social actions. I am firmly convinced that we can construct a fundamental and indestructible defence against the serious crises battering modern civilisation only when we acquire a spirit of tolerance and cooperation among ourselves and a harmonious attitude towards nature through challenging ourselves in this way. – *DI, Humanism and the Buddha. (published as part of an advertisement for Pres. Ikeda's recent publications in The Guardian (UK), Friday, 18 March 1988)*

113 ICHINEN SANZEN – THE HEART IS LIKE A SKILLED PAINTER

Volume five of Great Concentration and Insight states: "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... – The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind: *WND I*, 354

THE PRINCIPLE of three thousand realms in a single moment of life (Jpn. *ichinen sanzen*) ... is the theoretical elucidation of the Lotus Sutra. The Gohonzon, which was inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin, is the actual manifestation of the Buddha's enlightened life. When we chant daimoku to the Gohonzon, we are able to make direct contact with our own Buddha condition.

Briefly, the three thousand realms refers to the varying aspects and phases that life assumes from one moment to the next. At each moment, life manifests one of the Ten Worlds (see day 110). Each of these worlds (or life conditions) possesses the potential for all ten worlds within itself, thus making 100 possible worlds. Each of these hundred worlds possesses the ten factors and operates within each of the three realms of existence, thus making 3,000 realms.

The ten factors are the factors common to all life in any of the Ten Worlds. As listed in the Expedient Means chapter of the Lotus Sutra, they are:

1. appearance (external manifestation)
2. nature (spiritual aspect)
3. entity (who and what we are in total, including appearance and nature)
4. power (inherent energy)
5. influence (externally directed action)
6. internal cause (the direct cause for things to occur)
7. relation (the causes or conditions that activate the internal cause)

8. latent effect (the result produced in the depths of life by internal cause and relation)
9. manifest effect (the concrete, perceptible manifestation of the latent effect)
10. consistency from beginning to end (the perfect integration of these nine factors in every moment of life)

The three realms are the ways in which each moment's experience is unique for each person. They are:

1. the realm of the five components—form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness—which constitute a living being (in other words, our individuality)
2. the realm of living beings (the people and other living beings around us), and
3. the environment.

The three thousand realms in a single moment of life describes how life operates, and at the same time points the way to revealing the ultimate state of life, Buddhahood. In terms of Buddhist practice, our single moment of life (*ichinen*) determines the entirety of the three thousand realms (*sanzen*) or the circumstances of our lives. Concentrated prayer to the Gohonzon and actions based on those prayers create the power to transform a negative experience into a cause for happiness. In one of his lectures, SGI President Ikeda explains as follows:

The Kegon Sutra says, “The heart is like a skilled painter.” Like a great painter, the heart freely creates representations of all things. One's heart is the designer, the painter, the sculptor and the architect of his or her being.

The Great Teacher T'ien-T'ai cites this sutra passage in explaining the doctrine of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms. He uses the image of a great painter

to explain that the heart manifests in the three thousand realms of all phenomena.

It is our spirit, our life-moment, that counts. Our spirit is our hopes, our prayers. And it can be identified with the subconscious.

“What kind of future do I envision?” we may ask ourselves. “What kind of self am I trying to develop? What do I want to accomplish in my life?” We should paint the vision of our lives in our hearts as specifically as possible. This “painting” becomes the design for our future. The power of the heart enables us to actually execute a wonderful masterpiece in accordance with that design. This is the doctrine of a life-moment possessing three thousand realms. – DI, Learning from the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishōnin, 128-9

– SGI-Canada website

114 WHO ARE THE BODHISATTVAS OF THE EARTH?

Thus, in the “Treasure Tower” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha treats these great bodhisattvas as his disciples, admonishing and instructing them in these words: “So I say to the great assembly: After I have passed into extinction, who can guard and uphold, read and recite this sutra?” – The Opening of the Eyes I: *WND I*, 251

It follows, therefore, that whether eminent or humble, high or low, those who chant Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō are themselves the treasure tower, and, likewise, are themselves the Thus Come One Many Treasures. – On the Treasure Tower: *WND I*, 299

IN THE Emerging from the Earth (15th) chapter [of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni] says, “In this Saha world of mine there are bod-

hisattvas and mahasattvas who are as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges. After I have entered extinction these persons will be able to protect, read, recite and widely preach this sutra” (Lotus Sutra 15, 212-3).

Suddenly, the earth splits open and a great multitude of bodhisattvas emerge from its depths. They are all leaders, each of whom is followed by a large retinue. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth, led by four bodhisattvas named Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices and Firmly Established Practices, are endowed with splendid dignity and merit. The bodhisattvas of the original assembly are much taken aback. On behalf of the others, Bodhisattva Maitreya (Miroku) asks about the meaning of the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Shakyamuni indicates that he himself had converted and instructed these countless bodhisattvas since the time of his enlightenment in the remote past.

Filled with surprise and doubt, Maitreya then asks where and when Shakyamuni instructed them, beseeching him to answer clearly. In response, Shakyamuni begins to expound the Life Span chapter. Later, in the Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One (21st) chapter, Shakyamuni entrusts the Bodhisattvas of the Earth with propagating the Lotus Sutra after his death.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are bodhisattvas who possess the eternal Mystic Law in their lives. The Daishonin says that if they had not been entrusted with the supreme law, they could not possibly appear and propagate it in the Latter Day (MW1, 75). The “supreme law” means Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

As I mentioned earlier, the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that is implicit in the Life Span chapter is the great beneficial medicine that can lead all people of the Latter Day to enlightenment. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the law of life. Accordingly, one cannot save the people of the Latter Day unless one has been entrusted with this law and is able to manifest it for the sake of the people of the Latter Day.

For the liberation of all people of the Latter Day, Nichiren Daishonin, as the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, perceived that his own life was Nam-

myoho-rengé-kyo of the “Life Span” chapter, and manifested his life in the form of the Gohonzon.

The Daishonin says, “Faith means accepting and upholding this essential law. Faith is the sharp sword with which to subdue fundamental darkness” (Gosho Zenshu, 751). And, “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (*WND I*, 385).

Thus, we who practice faith in the Gohonzon and who advance kosen-rufu with the same mind as the Daishonin are also Bodhisattvas of the Earth who are entrusted with the supreme law. –*DI, Lectures on the Hoben and Juryo Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*

115 ICHINEN – WHAT IS AT THE CENTRE OF OUR LIVES?

So what is really important is that the teachings of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, of the hundred worlds and thousand factors, and of three thousand realms in a single moment of life [ichinen sanzen] are the essence of this sutra. – Letter to Gijo-bo: *WND I*, 389

WHAT IS at the centre of our lives at each moment is what we sometimes call our ichinen. Ichinen is therefore more than just determination, although members do use the term in that sense. Mr Matsuda, formerly editor of the Seikyo Times, explained this very clearly in a lecture he once gave on The True Object of Worship:

“In the depths of one’s being” means ichinen, the reality of one’s life at each moment. Our activities from moment to moment are manifestations of what we have in our ichinen or the depths of our hearts. In daily life, of course, we can pretend to be friendly to others while hating them inwardly. Strictly speaking, however, even if we try, our behavior may betray our hearts, depending

on the insight of the observer. This is especially true in the eye of Buddhism.

“Eventually, what you have in the depths of your mind will inevitably manifest itself.”

– *Prue Banerji, UKE Apr 1994*