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President Ikeda's Study Lecture Series

THE BUDDHISM OF THE SUN—ILLUMINATING THE WORLD

Key Passages from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*

[5] “Simile and Parable” and “Belief and Understanding” Chapters

The Mystic Law Is the Unsurpassed Treasure Possessed by All

Where we gladly greet the sun
Every care is gone at last;
Each a different course may run,
Therefore is the world so vast.¹

These words in praise of life were penned by the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), one of the great spiritual companions of my youth. I fondly recall reciting Goethe's poetry for my mentor, Josei Toda.

In May 1981, with a group of young people, I visited the house in Frankfurt where Goethe was born, and contemplated his magnificent life.

The SGI-Germany Villa Sachsen Culture Center, a much loved treasure of the community, stands in the scenic city of Bingen, which Goethe described as having “the most beautiful view of the Rhine.”

Two decades ago [in 2003], I lectured to a room full of bright young students at Soka University on Goethe's remarkable life and achievements and called on them to continue shining brightly like the sun, just as Goethe had done.²

¹ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*, translated by Krishna Winston, in *Goethe's Collected Works*, vol. 10, edited by Jane K. Brown (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 319.

² President Ikeda delivered the lecture at Soka University on March 10, 2003. It was later published and translated as “Goethe the Man.”

“There Are Many Joys in This World”

It is said that Goethe’s mother once wrote to him saying that there are many joys in this world, if only one knows how to look for them.³

The joy of living is the key to happiness in life. There is no greater treasure than the wisdom to freely find and bring forth joy and inspiration from the depths of one’s life.

In the Lotus Sutra, there are many expressions of rejoicing such as “dancing for joy” (see LSOC3, 105) and “their hearts were filled with great joy” (LSOC3, 89).

None express greater joy than Shakyamuni’s voice-hearer disciples when they learn, through the Buddha’s wisdom, of their true inherent potential—that they are not excluded from attaining enlightenment [as they were taught in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings], but in fact are destined to attain it and then go on to help others do the same.

Let us, too, as Soka Gakkai members who believe in and uphold the Mystic Law, each write a triumphant history pervaded with great joy by revealing our originally inherent life state, awakened to our true mission, through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Chapter Three: Simile and Parable

Nine important points

Point One, regarding the “Simile and Parable” chapter

Words and Phrases, volume five, says [regarding “simile and parable” (Jpn *hiyu*)], “*Hi*, or simile, means to compare one thing to another; *yu*, or parable, means to enlighten and instruct. . . . The Buddha’s great compassion is unceasing. And . . . his clever wisdom is boundless. . . .”

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: “Great compassion” is like the mercy and compassion that a mother feels for her child. At present it is the mercy and compassion of Nichiren and his followers. (OTT, 43)

³ See Karl Heinemann, *Goethe*, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1922), p. 10.

Parables Are Expressions of the Buddha’s Great Compassion and Wisdom

To enable all of his voice-hearer disciples to attain enlightenment, in the Lotus Sutra Shakyamuni engages in three rounds of preaching⁴ in accord with their differing capacities to understand his teachings. The first is preaching based on doctrine, the second is preaching based on parables, and the third is preaching based on connections [i.e., clarifying the Buddha’s connections to his disciples from past existences]. In this installment, we will focus on the sutra’s third and fourth chapters, “Simile and Parable” and “Belief and Understanding,”⁵ which both employ preaching based on parables.

The frequent use of parables is one of the distinctive features of the three rounds of preaching. In fact, of the seven parables⁶ in the Lotus Sutra, five appear in the two rounds of preaching based, respectively, on parables and on connections.

In the above passage from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, Nichiren Daishonin comments on a quotation from T’ien-t’ai’s⁷ *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* explaining that the parables of the “Simile and Parable” chapter are functions of the Buddha’s unending compassion and his boundless creative wisdom (see OTT, 43).

⁴ Also known as the three cycles of preaching.

⁵ The “Simile and Parable” (3rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra begins with Shariputra declaring that he is filled with pride and joy to know that he will attain Buddhahood in the future, after learning in the preceding “Expedient Means” chapter of the one great reason for which the Buddhas appear in the world—namely, to enable all people to attain enlightenment. After bestowing a prophecy of enlightenment on Shariputra, Shakyamuni then proceeds to preach the parable of the three carts and the burning house to explain “the replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle.” Starting from the second half of this chapter and continuing through the next three chapters—“Belief and Understanding” (4th) chapter, “Parable of the Medicinal Herbs” (5th) chapter, and “Bestowal of Prophecy” (6th) chapter—he bestows prophecies of the future enlightenment on the four great voice-hearers, Mahakashyapa, Maudgalyayana, Katyayana, and Subhuti. In the “Belief and Understanding” chapter, these four disciples rejoice and, to attest that they have understood the teaching, preach the parable of the wealthy man and his poor son, declaring their delight at having received this supreme treasure.

⁶ The seven parables that appear in the Lotus Sutra. They are (1) the parable of the three carts and the burning house in the “Simile and Parable” (3rd) chapter; (2) the parable of the wealthy man and his poor son in the “Belief and Understanding” (4th) chapter; (3) the parable of the three kinds of medicinal herbs and two kinds of trees in the “Parable of the Medicinal Herbs” (5th) chapter; (4) the parable of the phantom city and the treasure land in the “Parable of the Phantom City” (7th) chapter; (5) the parable of the jewel in the robe in the “Five Hundred Disciples” (8th) chapter; (6) the parable of the bright jewel in the topknot in the “Peaceful Practices” (14th) chapter; and (7) the parable of the skilled physician and his sick children in the “Life Span” (16th) chapter.

⁷ T’ien-t’ai (538–597): Also known as Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai or Chih-i. The founder of the T’ien-t’ai school in China. His disciple Chang-an (561–632) compiled what are regarded as T’ien-t’ai’s three major works: *Great Concentration and Insight*, *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, and *The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*.

Parables are more than just illustrative stories; they are expressions of—and, indeed, the crystallization of—the Buddha’s wisdom and compassion. In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni says: “The living beings in [this threefold world] are all my children” (LSOC3, 106). As these words indicate, the Buddha’s parables are rooted in his deep concern for all people as if they were his own children, and his ardent wish to protect them and lead them to enlightenment.

The Daishonin describes the “great compassion” of the Buddha, who wishes for all living beings to attain enlightenment, as being “like the mercy and compassion that a mother feels for her child” (OTT, 43). This “great compassion” is absolute and unconditional, naturally emanating from the Buddha’s state of being. And the Daishonin adds: “At present it is the mercy and compassion of Nichiren and his followers” (OTT, 43).

Through the power of his great compassion, the Daishonin continued his struggle to spread the Law widely, triumphing over every obstacle and even life-threatening persecution to free all people from suffering. Soka mentors and disciples, carrying on the Daishonin’s selfless struggle, have spread the Mystic Law throughout Japan and the world with unwavering faith, translating compassion into courageous action. The Soka family is a noble gathering of ordinary people who embody “the mercy and compassion of Nichiren and his followers” (OTT, 43).

Our members, even if experiencing difficulties of their own, are always praying and taking action wholeheartedly while thinking of others’ problems, ready to extend a helping hand. They genuinely listen to and acknowledge others’ worries. Their warm support and care activate the inherent strength of those who are struggling. This is an expression of compassion; it is the bodhisattva way of life. Our members, on their own initiative, dive in among the people and put such compassion into practice.

The Parables of the Lotus Sutra as Stories of Revitalization

The parables of the Lotus Sutra are stories of revitalization. They are dramas in which the Buddha’s creative wisdom and compassion reveal the Buddha nature hidden within all people and each person’s supreme dignity and worth.

Our members’ rich variety of experiences in faith attest to the power of the Mystic Law. They are the stories of human revolution that inspire and offer direction for people in all different walks of life and circumstances. Buddhism teaches the

principle of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma”⁸—that we have chosen to be born into this world with all kinds of problems and that it is our mission to overcome them and show actual proof of changing our karma through Buddhist practice. Our experiences of such transformation are inspiring and uplifting dramas of victory, testifying to the dignity of each person’s life. They have the power to relieve others’ suffering and impart joy.

One reason our founding president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, focused on discussion meetings to advance kosen-rufu was because, in a sense, they embody the power to enlighten and instruct, just like the Lotus Sutra’s parables, or illustrative stories. He always placed importance on sharing personal experiences in faith, rather than engaging in difficult, abstract theoretical discussions.

Offering concrete proof of the benefit of practicing Nichiren Buddhism is convincing and inspiring to people who are struggling with real-life challenges; it rouses their courage and fills them with the strength to tackle their karma head-on. Soka Gakkai discussion meetings, where members vibrantly share such experiences, are modern-day assemblies of the Lotus Sutra brimming with the conviction, joy, and vitality of faith.

Chapter Four: Belief and Understanding

Six important points

Point One, concerning the “Belief and Understanding” chapter

. . . Belief represents the value or price we attach to a jewel or treasure, and understanding represents the jewel itself. It is through the one word “belief” that we are able to purchase the wisdom of the Buddhas of the three existences. That wisdom is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

⁸ Voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma: This refers to bodhisattvas who, though qualified to receive the pure rewards of Buddhist practice, relinquish them and make a vow to be reborn in an impure world in order to save living beings. They spread the Mystic Law, while undergoing the same sufferings as those born in the evil world due to karma. This term derives from Miao-lo’s interpretation of relevant passages in “The Teacher of the Law” (10th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “Medicine King, you should understand that these people voluntarily relinquish the reward due them for their pure deeds and, in the time after I have passed into extinction, because they pity living beings, they are born in this evil world so they may broadly expound this sutra” (LSOC10, 200).

Belief is the source of wisdom and belongs to the stage of hearing the name and words of the truth. . . .

Now when Nichiren and his followers believe in and accept Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are gaining possession of a great precious jewel; in the words of the “Belief and Understanding” chapter, “This cluster of unsurpassed jewels / has come to us unsought” [LSOC4, 124]. (OTT, 54–55)

Attaining a Boundless Life State through Belief and Wisdom

Next, let’s examine a section from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* on the “Belief and Understanding” (4th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

Just prior to the passage we are studying here, the Daishonin states:

The truth of three thousand realms in a single moment of life too has its origins in this single word “belief” or “faith,” and it is through this single word “belief” that the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future attained their enlightenment.

This word “belief” is a sharp sword that cuts off fundamental darkness or ignorance.⁹ (OTT, 54)

Belief, he says, vanquishes fundamental ignorance and enables us to actualize in our lives the principle of “three thousand realms in a single moment of life.” Belief, or faith, is what makes it possible to attain Buddhahood in one’s present form.¹⁰ We must always remember that even Shariputra, who was regarded as the foremost in wisdom among the Buddha’s disciples, was able to “gain entrance through faith alone”¹¹ (LSOC3, 110).

“Understanding” means fully grasping the Buddha’s teachings. The Daishonin states: “Understanding’ is another name for wisdom” (OTT, 54).

⁹ Fundamental ignorance: Also, fundamental darkness. The most deeply rooted illusion inherent in life, said to give rise to all other illusions. The inability to see or recognize the ultimate truth of the Mystic Law or the negative impulses that arise from such ignorance.

¹⁰ Attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form: In contrast to earlier sutras that assert long eons of arduous practice across many lifetimes are required to attain Buddhahood, the Lotus Sutra teaches that all people can attain the state of Buddhahood in this lifetime, just as they are.

¹¹ Gaining entrance to faith alone: In the “Simile and Parable” (3rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni tells Shariputra, the foremost in wisdom among his disciples: “Even you, Shariputra, in the case of this sutra were able to gain entrance through faith alone” (LSOC3, 109–10).

He explains this using the following analogy: “Belief represents the value or price we attach to a jewel or treasure, and understanding represents the jewel itself. It is through the one word ‘belief’ that we are able to purchase the wisdom of the Buddhas of the three existences” (OTT, 54).

With the value of our belief or faith, we can acquire the wisdom that is the great treasure of the Buddhas of the three existences. Faith is the “source of wisdom” (OTT, 54) and the key to attaining Buddhahood. By having faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we can, just as we are, attain the elevated life state of Buddhahood.

Belief and Understanding Deepen Each Other

The faith described in the Lotus Sutra, however, is not blind faith. Faith that renders people incapable of thinking or reasoning for themselves makes them weak and vulnerable.

Mr. Toda often said that faith seeks understanding of the truth, and the understanding gained deepens faith.

Faith as taught in Nichiren Buddhism values our ability to reason and is deepened by our intellect and knowledge. The Daishonin sums up the relationship between faith and understanding in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*: “Where there is belief or faith, there is understanding, and where there is understanding, there will be faith. However, it is faith that makes it absolutely certain that one will attain Buddhahood” (OTT, 144).

He also says that “belief” means “to believe in the single truth or principle of the true aspect of all phenomena,” while “understanding” corresponds “to [the wisdom] that functions in accordance with changing circumstances, that is to say, ‘the [immeasurable] wisdom that is freely gained and employed’” (OTT, 55).

Through our faith in the Mystic Law, we can freely bring forth the boundless wisdom of the Buddha to overcome all manner of hardships. Those experiences will strengthen our conviction and certainty and reinforce and deepen our faith, which in turn will spark in our hearts an even greater passion to realize kosen-rufu.

Through applying ourselves to and deepening our faith, practice, and study day after day, we can make our lives shine with supreme wisdom and creativity.

Point Five, on the words “This cluster of unsurpassed jewels / has come to us unsought” [LSOC4, 124]. . . .

. . . And now in the minds of Nichiren and his followers, what is unsurpassed is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Among all the things that are unsurpassed, it holds the highest position of all.

It is the Wonderful Law [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] that is described . . . as a “cluster of unsurpassed jewels,” a cluster of jewels that represents all the paramitas,¹² the ten thousand religious practices and ten thousand good deeds of all the Buddhas of the three existences of past, present, and future.

And without labor or trouble, without religious practices or good deeds, this cluster of unsurpassed jewels can come into our possession through the single word “faith” [i.e., faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]. That is why the passage says that it has “come to us (*jitoku*) unsought.” (OTT, 58–59)

The Parable of the Wealthy Man and His Poor Son Related by Shakyamuni’s Disciples

Next, let’s examine the section of *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* about the Lotus Sutra passage “This cluster of unsurpassed jewels / has come to us unsought” (LSOC4, 124). This joyous exclamation is the starting point for the parable of the wealthy man and his poor son in the “Belief and Understanding” chapter. This parable is related by the four great voice-hearers—Mahakashyapa, Maudgalyayana, Katyayana, and Subhuti—as proof that they have understood Shakyamuni’s parable of the three carts and the burning house¹³ in the preceding “Simile and Parable” chapter.

The parable recounts how a man who left home as a youth wanders lost, living in poverty for 50 years, until one day, his wealthy father, who has been searching for him

¹² Paramitas: Practices required of Mahayana bodhisattvas in order to attain enlightenment. The Sanskrit word *paramita* is interpreted as “perfection” or “having reached the opposite shore,” i.e., to cross from the shore of delusion to the shore of enlightenment.

¹³ This parable relates how a father lures his children from a burning house in which they are playing, heedless of the danger. He tells them that he has goat-carts, deer-carts, and ox-carts waiting for them outside the house, but when they emerge he presents them with large carriages drawn by white oxen. The goat-carts, deer-carts, and ox-carts represent the three vehicles of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, and bodhisattvas, while the large carriages drawn by white oxen represent the one vehicle of Buddhahood, the Lotus Sutra. The father represents the Buddha, while the children are all living beings. The burning house is the saha world of suffering, in which, because of their mistaken views, they are plagued by delusion and earthly desires and repeatedly born in the cycle of the six paths, or lower six worlds—that is, the worlds of hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras*, human beings, and heavenly beings.

all that while, encounters him by chance. By that time, however, the son no longer recognizes his father and is awed and intimidated by him. He also has very low expectations for himself.

The father doesn't reveal his identity to his son but offers him a job—at first, asking him to perform menial tasks and then gradually giving him work of greater responsibility and importance. Finally, he places him in charge of administering all his wealth and goods, and the son becomes trusted by all.

When the father is about to die, he calls together his relatives, the king of the country, and the king's high ministers and announces: "This is in truth my son, and I in truth am his father. Now everything that belongs to me, all my wealth and possessions, shall belong entirely to this son of mine" (LSOC4, 122). The son is filled with joy at gaining this unsurpassed treasure, which has come to him unsought (see LSOC4, 123).

In the parable, the wealthy man represents Shakyamuni, while the impoverished son represents the voice-hearers, disciples who thought they could never attain enlightenment. It teaches us that the unsurpassed treasure of the Buddha nature is fundamentally inherent in all.

Unsurpassed means supreme. The life state of Buddhahood is described as "Among all the things that are unsurpassed, it holds the highest position of all" (OTT, 59). It is the supreme treasure possessed equally by everyone.

Coming into Possession of the "Cluster of Unsurpassed Jewels"

The "cluster of unsurpassed jewels" represents all the benefits acquired through the good deeds and practices carried out by the Buddhas of the three existences in their efforts to attain enlightenment. The Daishonin tells us that all those immense benefits are inherent in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

"And without labor or trouble, without religious practices or good deeds, this cluster of unsurpassed jewels can come into our possession through the single word 'faith' [i.e., faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]" (OTT, 59), states the Daishonin, underscoring how great and wonderful is our practice of chanting the single phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. It is extremely difficult, and at the same time astounding, to realize that the fruit of Buddhahood—a "cluster of unsurpassed jewels"—that so many seekers of the way had sought to gain through arduous practice over long eons in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings—are all contained in the single phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Just believing this requires an unceasing battle against fundamental ignorance. When we continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what our hardships and

sufferings, we will come to enjoy boundless good fortune, as if accumulating all the treasures of the universe in our lives.

Overflowing with “Strong Life Force and Wonderful Good Fortune and Benefit”

The Lotus Sutra passage states: “This cluster of unsurpassed jewels / has come to us unsought” (LSOC4, 124). “Unsought” reflects the fact that the persons of the two vehicles—the voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones—had given up on attaining Buddhahood and no longer even sought to do so.

“Has come to us” means that these supreme treasures are not something distant or separate from our lives, but are found within us. They are there for us to discover and make shine. We need to awaken to and bring forth the supreme treasure of our inherent Buddhahood and establish our true selves.

The Gohonzon, which is a “cluster of unsurpassed jewels,” makes it possible for all people to attain the supreme treasure of Buddhahood.

When we strive in our Buddhist faith and practice with an unflagging seeking spirit, we can attain an extraordinary state of life beyond all imagining.

Mr. Toda said: “People who joyously chant to the Gohonzon and joyously share Nichiren Buddhism with others are people of true faith. It is on such people that the Gohonzon bestows, though they do not seek them, unsurpassed treasures—namely, a strong life force and wonderful good fortune and benefit.”¹⁴

From the profound perspective of faith in the Mystic Law, we as Soka Gakkai members possess unfathomable good fortune. It is truly a cause for “dancing with joy”!

“The Greatest of All Joys”

“The greatest of all joys” (OTT, 212) is a famous phrase from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*.

It appears in the Daishonin’s commentary on the “Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples” (8th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, where—during the third round of preaching based on connections—Shakyamuni bestows prophecies of enlightenment on many individual voice-hearer disciples. Hearing this, the voice-hearers awaken to their inner potential and declare they are filled with great joy (see LSOC8, 191).

¹⁴ Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu* (The Collected Writings of Josei Toda), vol. 1 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1981), pp. 92–93.

The Daishonin then states: “This passage refers to the great joy that one experiences when one understands for the first time that one’s mind from the very beginning has been a Buddha. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys” (OTT, 211–12).

There is no greater joy than awakening to the reality that we inherently possess the supremely noble life state of Buddhahood. This is the immense joy encapsulated in the words “This cluster of unsurpassed jewels / has come to us unsought” (LSOC4, 124).

During the Osaka Campaign,¹⁵ our members were filled with great joy arising from their belief in the nobility and limitless potential of their own and others’ lives. And they threw themselves eagerly into the challenges of carrying out their human revolution and realizing the ideal of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.”

I chanted, fought my hardest, and called out to our leaders in Kansai, determined that we would report a resounding victory of the people to our mentor: “Let’s encourage and offer guidance to each individual, so everyone can experience personal revitalization in their lives. Let’s brim with joy and determination arising from faith in the Mystic Law. Let’s tell others about the pride of joining in a movement devoted to the noble mission of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth!” I fought as befits a youth and a disciple of Mr. Toda to build a “Golden Castle of Good Fortune,”¹⁶ exerting myself all-out as if to “exhaust the pains and trials of millions of kalpas” (OTT, 214).

This shared commitment of mentor and disciple striving in perfect unity came alive in all our Kansai members. They leaped into action, climbed the steep roads before them, and opened the way for the future of worldwide kosen-rufu. This dynamism, brimming with the greatest of all joys, is the driving force for the progress of our Soka movement and our never-ending victory.

Dialogue Bringing Hope and Courage

In this month of March [2023], let us spread the great joy of studying and practicing

¹⁵ Osaka Campaign: In May 1956, the Kansai members, uniting around a young Daisaku Ikeda, who had been dispatched by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda to support them, introduced 11,111 households to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism. In elections held two months later, the Soka Gakkai-backed candidate in Kansai won a seat in the Upper House, an accomplishment that was thought all but impossible at the time.

¹⁶ Golden Castle—literally, Jinzhou Castle, the name of an invincible fortress in ancient China—is a term that in the Soka Gakkai has become synonymous with the Kansai organization. A calligraphy that President Ikeda inscribed for the Kansai members reads: “Golden Castle of Good Fortune.”

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of the Sun each day, with the spirit of exerting ourselves even more from this moment on.

By continuing our efforts to engage in dialogue with the compassionate spirit of relieving sufferings and imparting joy—dispelling people's worries and fears by giving them hope and courage—let us create enlightened realms of peace and security for all.

Let's take pride in our philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, a "cluster of unsurpassed jewels," and dance together confidently with the joy of gaining a supreme treasure unsought!

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