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Key Passages from The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings

## [7] "The Teacher of the Law" Chapter

### **The Great Vow of Kosen-rufu Is the Heart of the Soka Gakkai**

We of the Soka Gakkai have inherited a great vow from our first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and his successor and second president, Josei Toda. It is the unprecedented, grand mission of kosen-rufu—to spread throughout the world the Buddhism of the Sun established by Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, and work for the happiness and peace of all humanity. That vow is the very heart of the first three Soka Gakkai presidents and their disciples. We have chosen to be born in this world to realize that noble mission, eagerly joining this gathering of Bodhisattvas of the Earth [that is the Soka Gakkai]. [...]

### **A Day We Renew Our Efforts for Kosen-rufu**

May 3 is the starting point for Soka mentors and disciples as they carry on the Daishonin's great selfless struggle to spread the Mystic Law. Our journey of mentor and disciple continues as we surmount and triumph over all trials and obstacles. [...]

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin states: "The 'great vow' refers to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]" (OTT, 82).

True bodhisattvas choose to appear in an evil age to fulfill that great vow, actively taking their place at the forefront of society in this suffering-filled world. They are the "teachers of the Law" we will learn about in this installment. [...]

## Chapter Ten: The Teacher of the Law

### *Sixteen important points*

#### Point One, concerning "the teacher of the Law"

*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* says: . . . Now Nichiren and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are the greatest among the teachers of the Law. (OTT, 81–82)

### **The Dual Aspects of the Teachers of the Law: Seeking the Way and Guiding Others to Enlightenment**

In discussing the teachers of the Law, the Daishonin first states that he and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are the foremost teachers of the Law. [...]

"The Teacher of the Law" chapter presents two aspects or roles of the teachers of the Law: first, they make the Law their teacher and guide in life, and second, they act as teachers, sharing with others the Law they have awakened to. The former is the aspect of seeking the way, benefitting oneself by striving for enlightenment, and the latter is guiding others, benefitting others by showing them the way to enlightenment. To focus solely on one's own enlightenment is to lack compassion for others, as exemplified by the practitioners of the two vehicles (voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones). On the other hand, focusing solely on benefiting others can lead to hypocrisy and

arrogance. Only when the two exist together, in a complementary fashion, can genuine humanity blossom.

The teachers of the Law dive among the people and tirelessly share the greatness of Buddhism. As the word “teachers” implies, they are spiritual leaders.

The Daishonin declares: “Now Nichiren and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are the greatest among the teachers of the Law” (OTT, 82).

True to these words, we of the Soka Gakkai, who today chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, are bringing forth the wisdom, compassion, and courage needed to contribute positively to society. We are great teachers of the Law in the direct lineage of Nichiren Daishonin.

### **Being Born in an Evil Age through the Power of Our Vow**

A noteworthy feature of “The Teacher of the Law” chapter is its description of bodhisattvas abandoning the immense pure rewards they have gained through their practice and being reborn in an evil age to preach the Lotus Sutra. It is a noble course they have chosen out of their wish to enable all living beings to attain enlightenment. Great Teacher Miao-lo<sup>1</sup> called this “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma,”<sup>2</sup> referring to how, through the power of their vow to save all living beings, these bodhisattvas appear in this suffering-filled saha world<sup>3</sup> and vigorously work to spread the Mystic Law. [...]

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin proclaims: “The persons who ‘are born in this evil world [or age]’ are Nichiren and his followers” (OTT, 82). In other words, Nichiren and his followers are the bodhisattvas who have made a vow to “voluntarily assume the appropriate karma.”

In these bodhisattvas’ hearts resonates the proud and joyous declaration: “United by the bonds of mentor and disciple, we have chosen to be born together in this world, in this evil age, through our shared vow!”

The mentors and disciples of Soka have in the present age been forging ahead dynamically to achieve worldwide kosen-rufu. Countless members around the globe have joyfully recounted their experiences of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma” and transforming karma into mission. They have shown how great is the human revolution of a single individual and what an unending source of hope and inspiration it can become.

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<sup>1</sup> Miao-lo (711–782): Also known as Great Teacher Ching-hsi, after his birthplace. A patriarch of the T’ien-t’ai school in China. He is revered as the school’s restorer. His commentaries on T’ien-t’ai’s three major works are titled *The Annotations on “The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra,”* *The Annotations on “The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra,”* and *The Annotations on “Great Concentration and Insight.”*

<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> Saha world: This world, which is full of suffering. Often translated as the world of endurance. In Sanskrit, saha means the earth; it derives from a root meaning “to bear” or “to endure.” For this reason, in the Chinese versions of Buddhist scriptures, saha is rendered as endurance. In this context, the saha world indicates a world in which people must endure suffering.

The Lotus Sutra says that those who embrace the sutra “freely choose where they will be born” (LSOC10, 202). We are all born now in the Latter Day of the Law, here in the land, place, time, and circumstances of our choosing to fulfill our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. When we awaken to our great vow from the infinite past, the meaning of our lives changes completely. All our sufferings are transformed into our mission because we are all, without exception, bodhisattvas who have made a vow.

We conduct activities overflowing with the joy that each of us is an “envoy of the Thus Come One” described in “The Teacher of the Law” chapter, “dispatched by the Thus Come One and carrying out the Thus Come One’s work” (see LSOC10, 200).<sup>4</sup> “Representatives of the Thus Come One” are now emerging everywhere around the world.

### **Kosen-rufu Begins with One-to-One Dialogue**

The term “teacher of the Law” may give the impression of someone who speaks before large audiences, but the Lotus Sutra clarifies that this is not necessarily the case. It states that someone who shares Buddhism with even one person is an envoy of the Thus Come One.

Whether we speak of spreading the Mystic Law or guiding people to enlightenment, both begin with touching the heart of the person right in front of us. All people are inherently worthy of supreme respect because they possess the Buddha nature. No one deserves to be disparaged or treated disrespectfully. That is why one-to-one dialogue and small gatherings are so important. [...]

Always doing our utmost to treasure each person, we have fostered individuals to stand up with us for this noble cause.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin goes on: “Now Nichiren and his followers, who now chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are the true envoys” (OTT, 83). We, the members of the Soka Gakkai earnestly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and persist in dialogue to help one person after another form a connection with Buddhism. We are therefore the true envoys of the Thus Come One.

Point Seven, on the robe, the seat, and the room in the passage “Medicine King, if there are good men and good women who, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, wish to expound this Lotus Sutra for the four kinds of believers [monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen], how should they expound it? These good men and good women should enter the Thus Come One’s room, put on the Thus Come One’s robe, sit in the Thus Come One’s seat, and then for the sake of the four kinds of believers broadly expound this sutra” [LSOC10, 205].

. . . Now Nichiren and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are fulfilling these three rules of preaching represented by the robe, the seat, and the room in each moment of their lives. The robe is the robe that is “gentle and forbearing” (chapter ten), as well as that which is referred to in the passage that says, “We . . . will put on the armor of perseverance” (chapter thirteen, Encouraging Devotion).

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<sup>4</sup> “The Teacher of the Law” (10th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra states: “If one of these good men or good women in the time after I have passed into extinction is able to secretly expound the Lotus Sutra to one person, even one phrase of it, then you should know that he or she is the envoy of the Thus Come One. He has been dispatched by the Thus Come One and carries out the Thus Come One’s work” (LSOC10, 200).

As for the seat, if one devotes oneself to the practice without begrudging one's life, then it becomes the seat of "the emptiness of all phenomena [having cut off attachment to one's transient status]" (chapter ten).

The room is so called because one dwells in "pity and compassion" (ibid.) when one expounds the teachings. It means to have the kind of concern that a mother has for her child. And are we not fulfilling these three rules of preaching in each moment of our lives? (OTT, 84–85)

### **The Three Rules of Preaching: The Robe, the Seat, and the Room**

Next, we will look at a section in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* about the three rules of preaching, also known as the three rules of the robe, seat, and room.<sup>5</sup> The word "rule" here has the meaning of "direction," "way," or "guideline." How should the good men and women—namely, the teachers of the Law—who practice the Lotus Sutra in the time after the Buddha's passing go about preaching the sutra for the sake of others? The three rules of the robe, seat, and room—richly human metaphors—serve as a guide for doing this. [...]

The three rules of the robe, seat, and room are presented after the Buddha warns: "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?" (LSOC10, 203). It is only to be expected that spreading the correct teaching in the evil age after Shakyamuni's death will provoke persecution. Persecution befell the Daishonin numerous times, just as the sutra passage states, including nearly being executed during the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.<sup>6</sup> He endured all this to teach and spread the great Law for the enlightenment of people into the eternal future of the Latter Day of the Law. We, too, must never give up or give in, whatever difficulties we may face. That resolute spirit is what defines a proud disciple of Nichiren Daishonin.

Buddhism means being victorious. We cannot brave and overcome the storms of opposition with only halfhearted resolve. That is why the "robe" we must don comprises "the robe that is gentle and forbearing" and "the armor of perseverance" (see OTT, 85).

The "seat" means being ready to "devote oneself to the practice without begrudging one's life" (see OTT, 85) amidst the raging waves of the real world and advancing fearlessly in the face of the devilish nature of arrogant authority. The "room" refers to compassion resembling the "concern that a mother has for her child" (OTT, 85) and also the strength to protect all from harm. [...]

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<sup>5</sup> Three rules of preaching: Also, known as the three rules of the robe, seat, and room. Three essentials for propagating the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after Shakyamuni Buddha's death mentioned in "The Teacher of the Law" chapter of the sutra. Shakyamuni declares: "If there are good men and good women who, after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, wish to expound this Lotus Sutra for the four kinds of believers [monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen], how should they expound it? These good men and good women should enter the Thus Come One's room, put on the Thus Come One's robe, sit in the Thus Come One's seat, and then for the sake of the four kinds of believers broadly expound this sutra. The 'Thus Come One's room' is the state of mind that shows great pity and compassion toward all living beings. The 'Thus Come One's robe' is the mind that is gentle and forbearing. The 'Thus Come One's seat' is the emptiness of all phenomena" (see LSOC10, 205).

<sup>6</sup> Tatsunokuchi Persecution: On September 12, 1271, Nichiren Daishonin, who was under arrest for false charges, was taken in the middle of the night to be secretly executed at Tatsunokuchi, but the attempt failed.

## Soka Gakkai Members Are Creating “Orchid Rooms of Compassion”

The three rules of the robe, seat, and room always reminds me of the dialogue between the host and guest in the Daishonin’s treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.”<sup>7</sup>

Both deeply troubled by the natural disasters afflicting the land and bringing suffering to the people, the host and guest find in each other someone to share their thoughts with and naturally sit down to talk together. As their conversation progresses, the guest reacts angrily to the host’s criticism of the Pure Land (Nembutsu) teachings and stands up to leave, but the host, with a calm smile, urges him to stay and patiently explains the reasoning and truth underlying his remarks. His anger eased, the guest once again listens receptively.

Here, the host warmly embraces the agitated guest with “the robe that is gentle and forbearing,” carrying on a dialogue that is honest, open, and free from prejudice. In so doing, he creates an “orchid room of compassion,” pervaded by empathy for those who are suffering.

The spread of such dialogue based on the three rules of the robe, seat, and room throughout Japan and around the world will build a solid foundation for realizing the Daishonin’s ideal of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.” This is not a goal for the far-distant future; it is being actualized now where our members, “the greatest among the teachers of the Law” (OTT, 82), engage in vibrant, ongoing dialogue.

## Sharing Buddhism in Daily Life

This year marks 80 years since the arrest and imprisonment of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, our first and second presidents, by Japan’s wartime militarist authorities [in July 1943]. Despite the harsh conditions of their incarceration, neither ever lowered the banner of dialogue for “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.” Mr. Makiguchi turned his interrogation sessions into opportunities for discussing Buddhist philosophy, and Mr. Toda introduced Nichiren Buddhism to his prison guards. [...]

When we earnestly and sincerely share Buddhism with others, we “lodge in the same place as the Thus Come One” (OTT, 83).<sup>8</sup> The teachers of the Law are always together with the Buddha.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin cites a commentary that states: “Morning after morning we rise up with the Buddha, evening after evening we lie down with the Buddha. Moment by moment we attain the way, moment by moment we reveal our true identity”<sup>9</sup> (OTT, 83).

The teachers of the Law embody, teach, and promote Buddhism unceasingly in the course of their daily lives. For this is the way to eternal happiness. [...]

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<sup>7</sup> “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land”: A treatise of remonstrance that the Daishonin submitted to Hojo Tokiyori, the retired regent but still the most powerful figure in Japan’s ruling clan, on July 16, 1260. It takes the form of a dialogue between a host and a guest, regarded as representing Nichiren Daishonin and Hojo Tokiyori, respectively. In it, the Daishonin predicts that, unless the correct teaching of the Lotus Sutra was followed, the country would in the near future suffer the calamities of internal strife and foreign invasion—the only two calamities among the “three calamities and seven disasters” that had not yet assailed Japan.

<sup>8</sup> “The Teacher of the Law” chapter of the Lotus Sutra states: “You should know that these people will lodge in the same place as the Thus Come One, and the Thus Come One will pat them on the head with his hand” (LSOC10, 204).

<sup>9</sup> From a commentary by Fu Ta-shih (497–569), a lay Buddhist in China who won the respect of Emperor Wu of the Liang dynasty, himself a devout Buddhist. He was not only an earnest practitioner of Buddhism, but also a great philanthropist.