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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*

[12] “The Life Span of the Thus Come One” Chapter—Part 2 [of 3]

A Sublime State of Being Where We Experience Joy in Both Life and Death

Throughout the long history of humankind, the nature of life and death has been the question of greatest concern for all philosophies and religions, East and West.

Buddhism, too, was born from an intense spiritual struggle to overcome the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death, as symbolized by the account of Shakyamuni's four meetings.¹

Nichiren Daishonin, from an early age, deeply pondered the meaning of life and death. He wrote:

I have been studying the Buddha's teachings since I was a boy. And I found myself thinking, “The life of a human being is fleeting. . . . It is the way of the world that whether one is wise or foolish, old or young, one never knows what will happen to one from one moment to the next. Therefore I should first of all learn about death, and then about other things.” (WND-2, 759)

Mr. Toda also often said that faith's true purpose is for the time of our death. And he declared: “The final question Buddhism must settle is death, and the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin provides the most fundamental answer to that question.”²

¹ Four meetings: The four encounters Shakyamuni had as the prince Siddhartha that awakened him to the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. One day on a pleasure outing, he emerged from the palace through the east gate and saw someone withered with age. On another occasion, he emerged from the southern gate on and saw a sick person. A third time, going out from the western gate, he saw a corpse. Finally, going out through the northern gate, he encountered a religious ascetic.

² Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda), vol. 5 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1985), p. 364.

How do we understand death? That question is inseparable from how we should live our lives. By squarely facing death and recognizing life's eternal nature, we can lead more deeply fulfilling and grounded lives. This is the ultimate aim of religion.

A View of Life and Death Providing a Light of Hope for Humanity

In September 1993, three decades ago, I presented my second invitational lecture at Harvard University.³ In seeking to conquer the fear and apprehension of death, I noted, humanity aspired for something eternal, which is why religion is as old as the history of humankind. But modern civilization, I pointed out, has diverted its gaze from this most fundamental question of existence:

Death is more than the absence of life, [and] death, together with active life, is necessary to the formation of a larger more essential whole. The greater whole to which I refer is the deeper continuity of life and death, which we experience as individuals and which we express as culture. A central and fundamental challenge for the coming century will be that of establishing a culture—based on an understanding of life and death and of life's essential eternity—that does not disown death, but directly confronts and correctly positions death within a larger living context.⁴

The essence of Mahayana Buddhism is its clear articulation of a view of life and death in which both can be experienced with joy, thus providing a light of hope for humanity.

The Noble Undertaking to Elevate the Life State of Each Individual

The Lotus Sutra reveals the pinnacle of Shakyamuni's view of life and death. When this profound understanding becomes the spiritual foundation for humankind, it will elevate the life state of each individual and open the way to great transformation, leading to the creation of societies where people live together in harmony and peace. This is the aim of our noble undertaking of kosen-rufu, and at the same time the historic significance of our efforts to spread the Mystic Law. Nichiren Buddhism

³ On September 24, 1993, President Ikeda delivered his second invitational lecture at Harvard University, entitled "Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilization." In it, he suggested that Mahayana Buddhism had three roles to play in 21st century civilization: acting as a driving force for the creation of a peaceful society, as a source for the restoration of humanity, and as a philosophical basis for the symbiotic coexistence of all things.

⁴ Daisaku Ikeda, "Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilization" <<https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/lect/lect-04.html>> (accessed June 13, 2024).

promotes a profound view of the inner nature of our lives and a keen and penetrating understanding of life and death, transforming all dread and trepidation about death into a fearless, straightforward view of reality that results in taking joy in both life and death.

The section of *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* we will study in this installment offers a full and complete presentation of this unexcelled, eye-opening view of life and death.

**[Chapter Sixteen: The Life Span of the Thus Come One
Twenty-seven important points]**

Point Four, regarding the passage “The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is. There is (*u*) no (*mu*) ebb or flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction.”

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: The “Thus Come One”⁵ is the living beings of the threefold world.⁶ When we look at these living beings through the eyes of the “Life Span” chapter, we can see and understand the true aspect of these beings who in their original states possess the Ten Worlds.⁷

The aspect or characteristics of the threefold world are birth, aging, sickness, and death. But if we look at birth and death in terms of their true nature, then there is no birth or death. And if there is no birth or death, then there is no ebb or flow. Not only do birth and death not exist. To look on birth and death with repulsion and try to escape from

⁵ Thus Come One: One of the ten honorable titles of a Buddha, meaning one who has come from the realm of truth. This title indicates that a Buddha embodies the fundamental truth of all phenomena and has grasped the law of causality spanning past, present, and future.

⁶ Threefold world: The world of unenlightened beings who transmigrate within the six paths (the realms from hell through heavenly beings). The threefold world consists of, in ascending order, the world of desire, the world of form, and the world of formlessness. In a general sense, it refers to the saha world in which we dwell.

⁷ Ten Worlds: They are the realms of hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras*, human beings, heavenly beings, voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas. They are also referred to as the ten life states of hell, hunger, animality, anger, humanity, heaven, learning, realization, bodhisattva, and Buddhahood.

them is termed delusion, or a viewpoint of acquired enlightenment.⁸ Seeing and understanding 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. (OTT, 127)

This Saha World Is the Eternal Land of Tranquil Light

Let us begin by reconfirming the core truth of the “Life Span” chapter.⁹ It reveals that Shakyamuni in fact first attained enlightenment not under the bodhi tree in his present life in India, but in the remote past, numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago.¹⁰ But that is not the only important teaching of this chapter.

It also discloses that Shakyamuni has been expounding the Law and guiding living beings to enlightenment here in this saha world¹¹ from the remote past and will continue doing so into the eternal future.¹² The true Land of Tranquil Light¹³ is not a

⁸ “Acquired enlightenment” is used in contrast with “original enlightenment.” According to the doctrine of original enlightenment, enlightenment is not something that one acquires through religious practice but something that exists in one’s original state of life. From this viewpoint, “acquired enlightenment” falls into the category of delusion, not true enlightenment.

⁹ After Shakyamuni’s attainment of enlightenment in the remote past, numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago, is revealed in the “Life Span” (16th) chapter, the sutra goes on to state that Shakyamuni has always dwelled in this saha world teaching and converting living beings since then. It also states that Shakyamuni has employed numerous expedient means, in both this world and others where he teaches, based on the capacities of the living beings there. In his tireless efforts to teach and convert them, he employs many similes and parables and relies on many causes and conditions. Shakyamuni also explains that, though he has always dwelled in this land, to cause living beings to seek him and his teaching he adopts the tactic of “appearing to enter nirvana as an expedient means” (see LSOC16, 271).

¹⁰ The sutras prior to the Lotus Sutra and the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra (the first 14 chapters) teach that after many lifetimes of practice Shakyamuni first attained enlightenment sometime from the age of 30 to 35 under the bodhi tree outside the city of Gaya (later Bodhgaya) in India. This is known as acquired enlightenment. But the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra reveals that Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood in the remote past, which is known as original enlightenment.

¹¹ Saha world: This world, which is full of suffering. Often translated as the world of endurance. In Sanskrit, *saha* 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.

¹² The “Life Span” chapter states: “I have been constantly in this saha world, preaching the Law, teaching, and converting” (LSOC16, 266).

¹³ Land of Tranquil Light: Also, Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. The Buddha land, which is free from impermanence and impurity. In many sutras, the actual saha world in which human beings dwell is described as an impure land filled with delusions and sufferings, while the Buddha land is described as a pure land free from these and far removed from this saha world. In contrast,

land separate from this one, it exists nowhere but in the saha world in which we dwell. This is a major change from teachings in previous Buddhist scriptures about attaining Buddhahood and the nature of the land or our world.¹⁴

Mr. Toda even declared: “Here, Buddhism was turned upside down.”

It was Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, who revealed this fundamental Law that Shakyamuni practiced to attain enlightenment.

The “Life Span” chapter also indicates that the eternal Buddha undergoes birth and death as an ordinary human being. It explains that when this Buddha who eternally leads people to enlightenment dies, it is merely a case of “appearing to enter nirvana as an expedient means” (see LSOC16, 271).¹⁵

This answers the question why the eternal Buddha dies. By entering nirvana (dying), the Buddha arouses in people’s lives the innate spirit of faith, inspiring them to seek the Buddha and the Law.

The “Life Span” chapter’s ultimate intent is to lead ordinary people to enlightenment. Its fundamental aim is to teach and convert living beings and help them attain Buddhahood. The Buddha strives eternally, employing wisdom and expedient means of all kinds, with the sole wish to enable living beings to put down good roots¹⁶ and cause them to awaken joyful minds.

For their part, living beings respond by rousing deep faith to seek the way and to practice the Buddha’s teachings. This eventually leads them to bring forth their inherent Buddhahood and transform the place where they are into the pure land of Eagle Peak.¹⁷ The “Life Span” chapter is indeed a teaching of the oneness of mentor and disciple. This section of *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* illuminates how mentor and disciple respond to each other and work together to realize their shared vow, living with a boundless awareness grounded in life’s eternity.

the Lotus Sutra reveals the saha world to be the Buddha land, or the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, and explains that the nature of a land is determined by the minds of its inhabitants.

¹⁴ This expresses the oneness or nonduality of the saha world and the Land of Tranquil Light, the assertion that the saha world of suffering and desire where ordinary people dwell is not separate from the Land of Tranquil Light where the Buddha constantly abides from the remote past.

¹⁵ The Lotus Sutra states: “In order to save living beings, / as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana / but in truth I do not pass into extinction. / I am always here, preaching the Law” (LSOC16, 270–71). The Buddha enters nirvana as an expedient means to arouse the longing and desire of living beings to see him.

¹⁶ Good root: Also, root of goodness, root of merit, good act, good cause, or act of merit. A cause, or action, that produces a good effect or reward. Good acts are compared to the roots that nourish the plants and trees so that they bear flowers and fruit. In Buddhism, “good roots” are necessary for the attainment of Buddhahood. Greed, anger, and foolishness are called the three bad roots or the three poisons. In contrast, “no greed, no anger, and no foolishness” are called the three good roots.

¹⁷ Eagle Peak is the place where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra. It is also called the pure land of Eagle Peak, symbolizing the Buddha land or the eternal state of Buddhahood.

The Buddha Goes Out among the Suffering People

The Lotus Sutra passage the Daishonin comments on here opens with the words “The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is” (LSOC16, 267).¹⁸

The wisdom of the Buddha is the wisdom of enlightenment that surveys the world as it truly is. The Buddha perceives the true aspect of all universal phenomena. The Buddha’s eyes of wisdom apprehend the reality of the “aspect or characteristics of the threefold world” (OTT, 127) in which we live.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says: “The ‘Thus Come One’ is the living beings of the threefold world” (OTT, 127). In other words, he declares that we ordinary people living in this corrupt and evil age are actually Buddhas.

Through the eyes of the Buddha, through the eyes of the “Life Span” chapter, the living beings of the threefold world, in their present form, are inherently Buddhas. The ultimate and most profound teaching of Buddhism is here revealed: Everyone is originally a Buddha, and we ourselves are the eternal Buddha.

The Daishonin says: “When we look at these living beings through the eyes of the ‘Life Span’ chapter, we can see and understand the true aspect of these beings who in their original states possess the Ten Worlds” (OTT, 127).

Living beings who dwell in the threefold world, which is rife with suffering and misery, appear on the surface to make their way through the deluded worlds of the six paths.¹⁹ But “through the eyes of the ‘Life Span’ chapter,” they are “beings who in their original states possess the Ten Worlds”—that is, they embody the principle of the “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.”²⁰ All living beings—whoever they are and whatever world or life state they reside in—equally possess the Ten Worlds. That naturally means that they possess the world of Buddhahood and are entities of the Mystic Law.

¹⁸ The Buddha sees the threefold world in which living beings dwell—the world of desire, the world of form, and the world of formlessness—as it really is and apprehends the Ten Worlds of all phenomena as they truly are. Based on this insight, the Buddha imparts the wisdom of his enlightenment to relieve the sufferings of all living beings.

¹⁹ Six paths: This refers to the first six of the Ten Worlds—the worlds of hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras*, human beings, and heavenly beings.

²⁰ Mutual possession of the Ten Worlds: The principle that each of the Ten Worlds possesses the potential for all ten within itself. “Mutual possession” means that life is not fixed in one or another of the Ten Worlds, but can manifest any of the ten—from hell to Buddhahood—at any given moment. The important point of this principle is that all beings in any of the nine worlds possess the Buddha nature. This means that every person has the potential to manifest Buddhahood, while a Buddha also possesses the nine worlds and, in this sense, is not separate or different from ordinary people.

The Buddha is not some special kind of being. The Buddha as taught in the “Life Span” chapter is one who manifests great compassion and, over repeated phases of life and death, leads living beings to enlightenment in this saha world. In the same way, we Soka Gakkai members, while grappling with our own problems here in the reality of the threefold world, go out among those racked by the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. With prayers of compassion and empathy, we act for our own and others’ happiness and for peace and harmony in society. As “envoys of the Thus Come One,” we carry out “the Thus Come One’s work” (see LSOC10, 200), undertaking the same actions as the Buddha to guide people to enlightenment. This clearly illustrates the principle of human revolution.

There is no Buddha other than living beings who confront and battle suffering. A Buddha is an ordinary person who willingly leaps in among suffering people to help them. Mr. Toda declared that we “reveal our true selves as inherently enlightened ordinary people.”²¹ To fulfill our eternal mission, each of us appears in this world “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma.”²² We are ordinary people demonstrating the inherent power of the Mystic Law. This profound view of the human condition and life is the inexhaustible origin of our humanistic, people-centered religion.

The Inherent Workings of Life in Its Eternity

Next, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* indicates that, when we see the true aspect of reality through the eyes of the “Life Span” chapter, all people—though themselves impermanent and unable to escape the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death—are infinitely noble individuals, eternally undergoing birth and death as phases originally inherent in life.

The Daishonin says: “The aspect or characteristics of the threefold world are birth, aging, sickness, and death. But if we look at birth and death in terms of their true nature, then there is no birth or death” (OTT, 127). “True nature” here is the original nature inherent in these two phenomena. We, too, embody the principle of the “mutual

²¹ Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda), vol. 3 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), p. 394.

²² 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 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).

possession of the Ten Worlds” and possess the eternal life of the eternal Buddha. The profound insight of the Buddha is that both birth and death are phases and functions of life’s eternal nature.

The Universal Rhythm of Birth and Death

Mr. Toda always said that after death, our lives merge with the universe: “It is not a rebirth—marking a fresh start with a clean slate—but a continuation. Our lives continue on from this existence into the next. . . . The universe has no beginning and no end. Our lives have no beginning or end, either. They go on forever.”²³

The Daishonin identified this eternal nature of life as the “two phases of life and death,” and the “two functions of Myoho-renge-kyo.” He writes: “No phenomena—either heaven or earth, yin or yang,²⁴ the sun or the moon, the five planets,²⁵ or any of the worlds from hell to Buddhahood—are free from the two phases of life and death. Life and death are simply the two functions of Myoho-renge-kyo” (WND-1, 216).

The Mystic Law is the fundamental principle extending through both life and death. It underlies not only to human life but all phenomena of the universe. All the living beings of the Ten Worlds and their environments are entities of the Mystic Law.

The wisdom of Buddhism recognizes that the entire universe eternally undergoes the rhythm of birth and death.

Living Each Moment of Life to the Fullest

The Daishonin then suggests that while [from the perspective of the eternal nature of life] birth and death do not exist (see OTT, 127), it is not that simple. For even when we overcome our deluded view of birth and death and see them from the perspective of their true nature, birth and death are still present as real parts of life. As the Daishonin notes, “To look on birth and death with repulsion and try to escape from them is termed delusion, or a viewpoint of acquired enlightenment” (OTT, 127). Ignorant of the eternity of life throughout the three existences—past, present, and future—and despising death while remaining attached solely to this present existence is delusion. Rejecting or negating life is also delusion.

²³ Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda), vol. 5 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1985), p. 411.

²⁴ Yin and yang are two universal principles of ancient Chinese philosophy. Yin is the negative, dark, and feminine principle; yang is the positive, bright, and masculine principle. Their interaction was thought to determine the destiny of all things.

²⁵ Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. In the 13th century, the more distant planets were yet unknown, and Earth was not known to be among the planets.

“Seeing and understanding the originally inherent nature of birth and death is termed awakening, or original enlightenment” (OTT, 127). By chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, we come to perceive the originally inherent nature of birth and death. That is, we gain deep conviction in the eternity of our lives throughout past, present, and future and bring forth the power to live this life in the most meaningful and fulfilling way. And, in accord with the strict Buddhist principle of cause and effect, our victory in this life determines our good fortune in the next.

That is why the Daishonin underscores the importance of “[summoning] up one’s faith . . . with the profound insight that now is the last moment of one’s life” (WND-1, 216). We must make each moment of our lives shine its brightest with the awareness that “now is the last moment.” We achieve this, the Daishonin says, when we “chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo” (OTT, 127).

By doing so, we lead a life in which we “realize the originally inherent nature of birth and death, and the originally inherent nature of ebb and flow” (OTT, 127). The Daishonin teaches us to deepen our understanding of the originally inherent nature of birth and death, imbue every aspect of our lives with the world of Buddhahood, and live with a vibrant, persevering spirit to the end.

By living each day with care and a sense of appreciation, we can awaken to the originally inherent nature of birth and death. Walking the path of mentor and disciple dedicated to kosen-rufu, filled with the joy of giving our all in the present moment, our lives are eternally indestructible. The rich benefit we accumulate each precious day enables us to carry out our originally inherent mission not only in this lifetime but throughout eternity.

The Buddha of the Lotus that is the entity of the Law (chapter eleven, point six), who is eternally endowed with the three bodies, is Nichiren and his disciples and lay supporters. That is because they embrace the title of honor, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. (OTT, 128)

We are the Buddha Originally Possessing the Ten Worlds

At the end of this section of *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says that the Buddha originally possessing the Ten Worlds who is eternally

endowed with the three bodies—the Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body²⁶—is we who practice with the same spirit as the Daishonin.

That is because when we “embrace the title of honor, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,” we can tap the power of the Mystic Law and make it pulse vibrantly in our lives. Our life and death become life and death in their true nature based on the great Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

We can fulfill our eternal mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth in accord with the Daishonin’s words: “Passing through the round of births and deaths, one makes one’s way on the land of the Dharma nature, or enlightenment, that is inherent within oneself” (OTT, 52). Because life and death are originally inherent, we have no reason to fear death and can savor joy in both life and death, and be equally happy and at ease with both.

Of course, as mortal human beings, the idea of death can make us feel sad and forlorn. When a loved one dies, waves of grief assail us. But if we steadily continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we can transcend the bounds of life and death and converse with our loved ones. Fellow members will also chant for us and support us in our loss. In time, we will come to find the profound meaning of our loved one’s death and feel a sense of hope for renewal. When we illuminate the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death with the light of the Mystic Law, we can transform them into the joy of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity.²⁷

In a letter to the lay nun Myoichi, the Daishonin offers unwavering assurance that her late husband is protecting her and her family (see WND-1, 536). He teaches that when those who have dedicated their lives to the Mystic Law die, their surviving loved ones are sure to be protected and make their way to happiness without fail.

To another disciple [the wife of Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro and mother of Nanjo Tokimitsu] about her late husband, the Daishonin writes: “When he was alive, he was a Buddha in life, and now he is a Buddha in death. He is a Buddha in both life and death. This is what is meant by that most important doctrine called attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form” (WND-1, 456).

²⁶ Three bodies: Three kinds of body a Buddha may possess. They are the Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body. The Dharma body is the fundamental truth, or Law, to which a Buddha is enlightened. The reward body is the wisdom to perceive the Law, so called because a Buddha’s wisdom is considered the reward of ceaseless effort and discipline. And the manifested body indicates the compassionate actions of the Buddha to lead people to happiness.

²⁷ Eternity, happiness, true self, and purity are known as the four virtues or four virtue *paramitas*. They describe the noble qualities of the Buddha’s life. The word *paramita* means “perfection.” “Eternity” means unchanging and eternal. “Happiness” means tranquility that transcends all suffering. “True self” means true and intrinsic nature. And “purity” means free of illusion or mistaken conduct.

As Soka Gakkai members, we know in our hearts how true this passage is. We have observed countless fellow members setting forth on their journeys into the next life—people who devoted themselves to compassionately spreading the Mystic Law and embodied an infinitely vast and sound view of life and its eternal nature. They were Buddhas in life and Buddhas in death, savoring joy in both life and death.

The Mission of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth Is an Eternal and Ongoing Struggle

In the light of the Daishonin’s writings, our journey of kosen-rufu is not at all limited to this lifetime. From the perspective of the Buddha—from a life state awakened to the inherent eternal nature of existence—death is just a short rest that is over “in no time” (WND-2, 860).

A new lifetime of mission and good fortune will soon begin, and with refreshed vigor we will freely enact a new drama based on our vow as a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

In lifetime after lifetime, we will enjoy benefit and fortune as we continue our work for kosen-rufu and establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land. Those who undertake that challenge will attain a supreme and unparalleled state of life in perfect rhythm with the Mystic Law, the fundamental Law of the universe.

Making the Treasure Tower within Each Person’s Life Shine

Concluding my lecture at Harvard University three decades ago, I cited a passage from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* and shared my hope for the future:

In the record of his orally transmitted teachings, Nichiren states: “We adorn the treasure tower of our being with the four aspects [of birth, aging, sickness, and death]” [see OTT, 90]. It is my earnest desire and prayer that in the twenty-first century each member of the human family will bring forth the natural luster of this inner “treasure tower” and, wrapping our azure planet in the symphonic tones of open dialogue, humankind will make its evolutionary advance into the new millennium.²⁸

Peace scholar Dr. Majid Tehranian (1937–2012) later commented on my lecture, saying that while discussing the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism, I was in fact presenting a vision of the future of civilization. Sociologist Dr. N. J. Demerath (1936–2021),

²⁸ Daisaku Ikeda, “Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilization” <<https://www.daisakuikeda.org/sub/resources/works/lect/lect-04.html>> (accessed June 13, 2024).

meanwhile, applauded my speech for refraining from an excessive use of specialized religious terminology while stressing the importance of a universal civil religion, a religion for all humanity.

I regard these positive assessments by leading thinkers as expressions of their high expectations and encouragement for our movement as Bodhisattvas of the Earth practicing the essence of Mahayana Buddhism, with its profound philosophy that both birth and death are originally inherent in life. They see in our movement a positive new trend for the development of civilization of the 21st century.

Together Walking the Eternal Path of the Oneness of Mentor and Disciple

We can all sense that humanity is at a major crossroads. In this perilous age, people are looking forward with ever-growing interest and hope to our actions and initiatives based on the life-affirming principles of Nichiren Buddhism.

In high spirits, with enthusiasm and vigor, let's continue together on our journey of kosen-rufu, in which joy pervades both life and death.

Confidently illuminating the world with the Buddhism of the Sun, let us keep forging ahead together on the great path of the oneness of mentor and disciple toward the sure realization of happiness for ourselves and others and lasting peace!

(Translated from the October 2023 issue of the *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai monthly study journal)