

# SGI Newsletter

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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*

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

#### Praying Each Day and Working to Build a World of Happiness Embodying the Words “This, My Land, Remains Safe and Tranquil”

“What is the social purpose of religion if it is not working for the happiness of humanity and making the world a better place? Isn't there beneficial value in helping people become happy? Isn't there moral value in improving the world?”<sup>1</sup> These are the famous words of our founder, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, in *Kachi-ron* (Theory of Value), the second volume of *Soka kyoikugaku taikai* (The System of Value-Creating Education).<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Makiguchi cited the “Life Span” (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra<sup>3</sup> as the ultimate expression of the true value of religion and stated that the chapter “represents

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Soka kyoikugaku taikai* (The System of Value-Creating Education), in *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu* (Collected Writings of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi), vol. 5 (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1982), p. 356.

<sup>2</sup> *Soka kyoikugaku taikai* (The System of Value-Creating Education): A two-volume presentation of first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's innovative educational theory. It sought to provide “a system of methodology for fostering individuals capable of creating value, which is the purpose of life.” The first volume of the work was published on November 18, 1930, with the financial and logistical support of Makiguchi's disciple Josei Toda, in a joint effort of mentor and disciple. The second volume was published in 1931.

<sup>3</sup> After the Buddha's attainment of enlightenment in the remote past is revealed in the first part of the prose portion of the “Life Span” (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the latter prose part narrates the parable of the skilled physician and his sick children to explain why the eternal Buddha enters nirvana (“entering nirvana as an expedient means,” see LSOC16, 271). The contents of the prose section are then reiterated in the following verse section, which, since it starts with the words “*Ji ga toku burrai*” (“Since I attained Buddhahood,” LSOC16, 270), is referred to in Japanese as the *jigage* (lit. “verse of oneself”). Nichiren Daishonin lauds the verse section, saying: “The Buddhas throughout the ten directions looked up to the verse section of the ‘Life Span’ chapter as their teacher and attained Buddhahood” (WND-1, 517). We recite the verse section in our daily practice of gongyo in praise of the nobility of our own lives.

Shakyamuni’s promise to enable all people afflicted by the sufferings of life to attain Buddhahood and dwell securely in the joy of eternal life.”<sup>4</sup>

How do we overcome the sufferings in our lives? How can we attain an unshakable state in which we savor the true joy of living? A religion that creates genuine value is defined by its ability to transform people’s actual lives and society. This guiding belief informed Mr. Makiguchi’s lofty ideals and actions.

## **The Great Path of Humanistic Religion**

Mr. Makiguchi issued a sharp and fundamental challenge to the traditional philosophical notion of a religious “value of holiness” divorced from the real world. My mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, also often made clear that we are not spiritual opportunists who take advantage of religion for personal gain.

Inheriting the teachings of Presidents Makiguchi and Toda, I have striven together with my fellow members to expand our solid alliance for peace, culture, and education based on Buddhist humanism. The true aim of religion must be to make people strong, good, and wise.

The Lotus Sutra is a treasure trove of wisdom and the source of a religious movement that exists for and genuinely empowers people.

The “Life Span” chapter and, in particular, its verse section, portrays the real nature of the Buddha striving eternally to enable all living beings to attain enlightenment, and describes those who seek their mentor and spread the Law with selfless dedication. It highlights the vow at the heart of the shared struggle of mentor and disciple. Upholding the humanistic teachings of Buddhism, they work together to create supreme value by helping people realize a state of absolute and indestructible happiness—in accord with the passage “where living beings enjoy themselves at ease” (LSOC16, 272)<sup>5</sup>—and building a Buddha land—as described by the passage “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil” (LSOC16, 272).<sup>6</sup>

In this installment, we will study the section in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* discussing the “Life Span” chapter’s verse portion. Let us reaffirm the great path of Soka dedicated to realizing kosen-rufu through compassionately spreading the Mystic Law, directly connected to Nichiren Daishonin,

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Soka kyoikugaku taikai* (The System of Value-Creating Education), in *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu* (Collected Writings of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi), vol. 5 (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1982), p. 357.

<sup>5</sup> The “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes the world in which we dwell as a place “where living beings enjoy themselves at ease” (LSOC16, 272). This indicates that the saha world, normally regarded as a realm of suffering, is actually the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, or a Buddha land, where all living beings can experience the greatest enjoyment.

<sup>6</sup> A passage from the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. “This, my land” refers to the saha world in which Shakyamuni dwells eternally.

the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. Ultimately, the verse section of the “Life Span” chapter is a song in praise of our own lives.

### **Like the Assembly on Eagle Peak Which Continues for All Time**

Ninety-three years have passed since Presidents Makiguchi and Toda’s passionate commitment to kosen-rufu led to the Soka Gakkai’s founding, and ten years since we completed the Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu in Shinanomachi, Tokyo.

Humanity is now facing numerous difficulties, but in these troubled times—in fact, precisely because of them—our members have persevered through diverse challenges over the past decade and strengthened their bonds of hope and encouragement.

The development of our movement for kosen-rufu around the world is also astonishing. It is all due to our noble members who are striving valiantly to fulfill their vow from the distant past, with the firm conviction that “When great evil occurs, great good follows” (WND-1, 1119).

This summer [in July 2023], regular gongyo meetings resumed at the Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu [after a hiatus of three and a half years due to the Covid-19 pandemic]. Courageous Bodhisattvas of the Earth who have wondrously emerged together at this time all around the globe are gathering here, uniting in prayer to fulfill the great vow for kosen-rufu through the compassionate propagation of the Mystic Law.<sup>7</sup>

I truly feel that each of these gatherings deserves to be described as “the assembly on Holy Eagle Peak which continues in solemn state and has not yet disbanded” (OTT, 135),<sup>8</sup> a passage cited by the Daishonin in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*.

The Daishonin states: “‘Holy Peak’ [Eagle Peak] refers to the Gohonzon. It also refers to the place where Nichiren and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, dwell” (OTT, 135). Our reciting of gongyo and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, as individuals and as families, every morning and evening connects us, each a Bodhisattva of the Earth, to the assembly on Eagle Peak in the depths of our lives. We bring forth the same life state of Buddhahood as the Daishonin and renew our vow for kosen-rufu.

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<sup>7</sup> The Soka Gakkai Joju Gohonzon, enshrined in the Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu, bears the margin inscription “For the Fulfillment of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu through the Compassionate Propagation of the Great Law.”

<sup>8</sup> Words of Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai that the Daishonin cites in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, to underscore that the assembly on Eagle Peak where Shakyamuni preaches the Lotus Sutra is eternal and never ending.

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

**Point Fifteen, regarding the passage “When living beings witness the end of a kalpa / and all is consumed in a great fire, / this, my land, remains safe and tranquil, / constantly filled with heavenly and human beings. / The halls and pavilions in its gardens and groves / are adorned with various kinds of gems. / Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit / where living beings enjoy themselves at ease. / The gods strike heavenly drums, / constantly making many kinds of music. / Mandarava blossoms rain down, / scattering over the Buddha and the great assembly. / My pure land is not destroyed, / yet the multitude sees it as consumed in fire, / with anxiety, fear, and other sufferings / filling it everywhere. / These living beings with their various offenses, / through causes arising from their evil actions, / spend asamkhya kalpas<sup>9</sup> / without hearing the name of the three treasures. / But those who practice meritorious ways, / who are gentle, peaceful, honest, and upright, / all of them will see me / here in person, preaching the Law” [LSOC16, 272].**

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: This passage is a hymn of praise on the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life revealed in the “Life Span” chapter of the essential teaching. The words “When . . . all is consumed in a great fire” in fact signify the great fire of earthly desires.<sup>10</sup> The words “this, my land, remains safe and tranquil” refer to the realm of the environment. The words “where living beings enjoy themselves at ease” refer to the realm of living beings. The words “Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit” refer to the realm of the five components. Thus this part of the passage is clearly speaking of the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. (OTT, 136)

<sup>9</sup> *Asamkhya* is a numerical unit of ancient India used to indicate an exceedingly large number, while *kalpa* in ancient Indian cosmology refers to an extremely long period of time.

<sup>10</sup> Earthly desires are inner workings or deluded impulses that cause suffering, distort our judgment, and obstruct our Buddhist practice.

## The Verse Section of the “Life Span” Chapter Is an Ode to Our Own Lives

The Daishonin notes that when we combine the Chinese character *ji* (self) of the opening line of the verse section—“*ji ga toku burrai*” (Since I attained Buddhahood) (LSOC16, 270)—and the final Chinese character *shin* (body) of the closing line—“*soku joju busshin*” (quickly acquire the body of a Buddha) (LSOC16, 273), this forms the word *jishin*, meaning “oneself” (see OTT, 140). In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin stresses the profound significance of this, interpreting this part of the verse section from beginning to end as both an ode lauding the life of the Buddha, who ceaselessly strives to relieve people’s suffering, and at the same time an ode to our own lives, celebrating that all living beings of the nine worlds are inherently Buddhas. And it is we of the Soka Gakkai who have inherited and carry on the Buddha’s great struggle.

The passage we are studying here discusses a sutra passage affirming that for those who believe in the Mystic Law, this saha world<sup>11</sup> is the true Buddha land where the Buddha resides eternally. The Daishonin states: “This passage is a hymn of praise on the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life<sup>12</sup> revealed in the ‘Life Span’ chapter of the essential teaching” (OTT, 136). As “the revelations in this ‘Life Span’ chapter make clear” (OTT, 137), he notes, living beings steeped in suffering can embody the Mystic Law of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which enables living beings to awaken to their inherent Buddhahood.

The Daishonin here focuses specifically on the aspect of the three realms of existence—namely, the realm of the environment, the realm of living beings, and the realm of the five components.<sup>13</sup> These are a core component of the three thousand realms in a single moment of life, which Nichiren Buddhism regards as a principle of transformation.

In other words, when a great fire of earthly desires envelops the world in an evil age, those who embrace the Mystic Law, the Daishonin says, can transform the place where they dwell into a land that is safe and tranquil. For us, this is our realm of the

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<sup>11</sup> 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. In this context, the saha world indicates a world in which people must endure suffering.

<sup>12</sup> Three thousand realms in a single moment of life (Jpn. *ichinen-sanzen*): A philosophical system established by T’ien-t’ai of China based on the Lotus Sutra. The “three thousand realms” indicates the varying aspects and phases that life assumes at each moment. At each moment, life manifests one of the Ten Worlds. Each of these worlds possesses the potential for all ten within itself, thus making one hundred possible worlds. Each of these hundred worlds possesses the ten factors and operates within each of the three realms of existence, thus making three thousand realms. In other words, all phenomena are contained within a single moment of life, and a single moment of life permeates the three thousand realms of existence, or the entire phenomenal world.

<sup>13</sup> Five components are form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness.

environment. Further, those who strive for kosen-rufu gain a life state in which they “enjoy themselves at ease.” This is our realm of living beings. The land is adorned with beautiful gardens and groves. “Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit” [corresponding to noble individuals who impart rich benefit to others] indicates that the spirit of compassion comes to permeate every aspect and function of our lives. This is our realm of the five components.

The Daishonin declares: “Now Nichiren and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are the very persons referred to here [in this sutra passage]” (OTT, 137). When we embrace faith in the Mystic Law, the life state of Buddhahood illuminates the entirety of the three realms of existence, based on the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

### **Kosen-rufu Is the Way to Build a True Realm of Peace and Happiness**

On September 8, 2002, a year after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, youth representatives from around the globe gathered with me in Tokyo. After doing gongyo and praying together for world peace with these young people dedicated to their mission from the distant past, I referred to the Lotus Sutra passage “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil, constantly filled with heavenly and human beings” (LSOC16, 272) and said:

There is still immense suffering in the world today—suffering as painful as being “consumed in a great fire” (LSOC16, 272). Our noble movement for kosen-rufu, upholding the philosophy of the eternity of life, is firmly committed to creating a world where people live together in happiness and peace—an ideal society that humanity has always longed for.<sup>14</sup>

Everyone was serious, their eyes shining with determination, vows and joy spreading among them. The hearts of these young leaders from across the globe blazed with the powerful conviction that there is no ideal realm of happiness apart from the real world, and a deep, passionate resolve to create a world that embodies the Buddha’s words “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil.” I was convinced that they represented the epitome of peace for the global family.

When the joyful actions of courageous Bodhisattvas of the Earth dedicated to “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” spread throughout the world, the path to building a true realm of happiness and prosperity for all will open.

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<sup>14</sup> From a speech delivered at a special world peace gongyo meeting with participants of the 2002 SGI Youth Training Course, held at the Soka Culture Center, Shinanomachi, Tokyo, on September 8, 2002—the 45th anniversary of second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda’s Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons.

This is the essence of our unprecedented movement aligned with the ultimate principle for change, the actual three thousand realms in a single moment of life.<sup>15</sup>

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**Point Sixteen, on the words “I am the father of this world”  
[LSOC16, 273].**

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: “I” refers to Shakyamuni Buddha, the father of all living beings. The Lotus Sutra assures us that both the Buddha and the sutra itself possess the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent.<sup>16</sup>

The assurance regarding the Buddha is found in the passage concerning the three virtues of the Buddha of the theoretical teaching that reads, “But now this threefold world / is all my domain, / and the living beings in it / are all my children. / . . . I am the only person / who can rescue and protect others” (chapter three, Simile and Parable). As for the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent as they pertain to the Buddha of the essential teaching, the virtue of sovereign is attested in the words “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil” (chapter sixteen); that of teacher in the words “Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching, converting” (ibid.); and that of parent in the words “I am the father of this world” (ibid.). (OTT, 137)

**Nichiren Daishonin Is the Sovereign, Teacher, and Parent of the Latter Day of the Law**

Next, let us examine Point Sixteen on the “Life Span” chapter in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, commenting on the words “I am the father of this world” (LSOC16, 273). Shakyamuni as the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past is described in terms of the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent,

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<sup>15</sup> Actual three thousand realms in a single moment of life: In the Latter Day, the Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo revealed by Nichiren Daishonin is the actual teaching of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

<sup>16</sup> Three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent: Three virtues that all living beings should respect. The virtue of the sovereign is the power to protect all living beings, the virtue of the teacher is the wisdom to instruct and lead them to enlightenment, and the virtue of the parent is the compassion to nurture and support them.

and Nichiren Daishonin is identified as the one embodying these virtues in his actions in the Latter Day of the Law.

The sutra's words "I am the father of this world" refer to the parable of the skilled physician and his sick children.<sup>17</sup> Shakyamuni, like the father in that parable who is a physician, is "the father of all living beings" (OTT, 137) in the real threefold world. And just as the physician saved his deluded children [who had become senseless after consuming poison and refused the beneficial medicine he had prepared], Shakyamuni exerts himself tirelessly to save those who are suffering from "befuddlement" (LSOC16, 273).<sup>18</sup>

Here, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* highlights the three virtues of Shakyamuni by introducing a passage from the "Simile and Parable" (3rd chapter<sup>19</sup> of the theoretical teaching (the first half of the Lotus Sutra), and passages from the "Life Span" (16th) chapter of the essential teaching (the second half of the Lotus Sutra). With regard to the latter, the Daishonin says, the "virtue of sovereign is attested in the words 'This, my land, remains safe and tranquil' [LSOC16, 272]; that of teacher in the words 'Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching, converting' [LSOC16, 270]; and that of parent in the words 'I am the father of this world' [LSOC16, 273]" (OTT, 137).

The Daishonin then states: "Now Nichiren and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, are the fathers of all living beings, for we save them from the torments of the hell of incessant suffering" (OTT, 138). Here, he asserts that in the Latter Day of the Law, he and his disciples are the "fathers of all living beings," engaged in the great challenge of relieving the sufferings of all people by leading them to enlightenment.

In "The Opening of the Eyes," which the Daishonin composed while in exile on Sado Island, he writes: "I, Nichiren, am sovereign, teacher, and father and mother to all the people of Japan" (WND-1, 287).

Here, he expresses his conviction that he is "the sovereign, teacher, and parent" of the Latter Day of the Law who has stood up with boundless compassion to lead all

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<sup>17</sup> Parable of the skilled physician and his sick children: One of the seven parables of the Lotus Sutra, it tells the story of a skilled physician with many children, who drink poison while he, their father, is away. The father prepares a beneficial medicine but some of the children have lost their reason and refuse to drink it, so he leaves the medicine and departs to a distant land. From there, he dispatches a messenger, who informs the children that their father has died. Grief-stricken, they finally come to their senses, take the medicine their father has left them, and are immediately cured. The father then returns home and they are all happily reunited.

<sup>18</sup> In the "Life Span" chapter, Shakyamuni says: "I am the father of this world, / saving those who suffer and are afflicted. / Because of the befuddlement of ordinary people, / though I live, I give out word I have entered extinction" (LSOC16, 273).

<sup>19</sup> This is a reference to the passage: "But now this threefold world / is all my domain, / and the living beings in it / are all my children. / Now this place / is beset by many pains and trials. / I am the only person / who can rescue and protect others" (LSOC3, 105–06).



people to enlightenment in an evil age rife with slander of the Law and human suffering. He fearlessly engages in spreading the correct Buddhist teaching, undeterred by the harshest persecution. He possesses a towering state of being where he can regard even life-threatening exile as a source of “great joy” (see WND-1, 287).<sup>20</sup>

### **All Sufferings Are the Sufferings of Nichiren**

At the end of this section of *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* on the words “I am the father of this world” (LSOC16, 273), the Daishonin quotes a passage from the Nirvana Sutra: “The varied sufferings that all living beings undergo—all these are the Thus Come One’s own sufferings” (OTT, 138).

Immediately preceding those words in the Nirvana Sutra is the statement: “Seeing living beings suffer is like my own pain.” The Buddha regards the sufferings of all living beings as his own.

In light of this, the Daishonin declares in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*: “The varied sufferings that all living beings undergo—all these are Nichiren’s own sufferings” (OTT, 138).

Also, in “On Reprimanding Hachiman,” after quoting the same Nirvana Sutra passage cited in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin writes: “The sufferings that all living beings undergo, all springing from [the] one cause—all these are Nichiren’s own sufferings” (WND-2, 934).

The sufferings each of us experiences are indeed diverse or “varied,” but at the same time, all derive ultimately from earthly desires (or deluded impulses) and, more specifically, fundamental ignorance.<sup>21</sup> Though they appear to be varied and diverse, they are in fact sufferings springing from one source or cause. How do we sever that root of suffering? Through faith, through belief, as the Daishonin asserts: “This word ‘belief’ [or faith] is a sharp sword that cuts off fundamental darkness or ignorance” (OTT, 54).

Wielding the “sharp sword” of the Mystic Law, the Daishonin severs the fundamental ignorance of all living beings and “blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering”<sup>22</sup> (WND-1, 736). In doing so, he opens the way for the flow of kosen-rufu through compassionately spreading the Mystic Law throughout the Latter Day and into the infinite future.

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<sup>20</sup> The Daishonin writes: “For what I have done, I have been condemned to exile, but it is a small suffering to undergo in this present life and not one worth lamenting. In future lives I will enjoy immense happiness, a thought that gives me great joy” (WND-1, 287).

<sup>21</sup> 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.

<sup>22</sup> The Daishonin writes: “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” (WND-1, 736).

Each of us, in our own place of mission, is making patient, persistent efforts to reach out with sincerity and empathy to those around us, seeking to alleviate their pain and suffering. We have built a network of good friends<sup>23</sup> that brings people together.

These efforts bring to life in our modern world the Buddha's spirit of boundless compassion to relieve the "sufferings of all living beings" on the most fundamental level. The time has come to show the world even more the true value of our great global movement of Bodhisattvas of the Earth dedicated to removing suffering and imparting joy.

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**Point Nineteen, on the words "At all times I think to myself [literally, make this thought]" [LSOC16, 273].**

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: "At all times" designates the three existences of past, present, and future. "Myself" refers specifically to Shakyamuni Buddha, and in a more general way to the Ten Worlds.

The words "this thought" in the phrase "make this thought" refer to the eternally inherent single thought of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The word "make" here is not the "make" of "made" or "created," but rather the "make" of "not made" or "not created," that is, eternal and inherent. . . . Now the thought expressed by Nichiren and his followers as they chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the thought of great pity and compassion. (OTT, 139–40)

**"At All Times I Think To Myself"—The Heart of the Buddha's Vow**

Discussing the phrase "At all times I think to myself [literally, make this thought]" (LSOC16, 273), the Daishonin says that "At all times" refers to the eternity of the three existences of past, present, and future, while "I" refers to Shakyamuni himself. In light of the principle of the Ten Worlds inherent in all living beings, it also refers to us and to the wish and actions of the Buddha.

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<sup>23</sup> In Buddhism, a "good friend" is an upright, virtuous person who leads people to Buddhism. It is contrasted with an evil friend or negative influence that leads people astray or obstructs their practice of Buddhism.

The Daishonin also refers to “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?]’” (WND-1, 62). The very life of the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past is his endless struggle for the happiness of all living beings.

A person’s life state and true substance are revealed by what they always cherish in their hearts and think about.

Regarding the phrase “At all times I think to myself [literally, make this thought]” (LSOC16, 273), the Daishonin says: “The words ‘this thought’ . . . refer to the eternally inherent single thought of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo” (OTT, 139).

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the diligent practice that exhausts the pains and trials of millions of kalpas [in our practice for ourselves and others].<sup>24</sup> Whatever our circumstances, we continue to pray morning and evening and act based on our vow for kosen-rufu in the spirit of “regarding both suffering and joy as facts of life” (see WND-1, 681).

This contributes immeasurably to polishing our lives at the deepest level. Forging and imbuing our lives with the Mystic Law is the most beneficial Buddhist practice we can engage in and the ultimate source of great benefit.

### **Praise for Our Noble Bodhisattva Practice**

Jao Tsung-I (1917–2018) was one of China’s most preeminent sinologists. We forged a deep friendship and even published a dialogue together. Dr. Jao inscribed and presented me with a marvelous calligraphic work of the Lotus Sutra passage “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?”

Why did he choose those words?

Dr. Jao said he admired our noble practice of the bodhisattva way, united by the bonds of mentor and disciple, and the leadership we were taking which he saw as filled with love for humanity and a spirit of service to the people. He was also inspired by the actions of our members to impart hope and courage to each individual and help them realize an unsurpassed life state. All of this, he said, seemed to perfectly reflect those closing lines of verse from the “Life Span” chapter.

This familiar passage—which in Chinese comprises 20 characters—has magnificent power. I was deeply appreciative of Dr. Jao’s kind assessment. This passage, I noted, means to persistently and continually think about how to enable

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<sup>24</sup> In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* states: “If in a single moment of life we exhaust the pains and trials of millions of kalpas [in our practice for ourselves and others], then instant after instant there will arise in us the three Buddha bodies with which we are eternally endowed. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is just such a ‘diligent’ practice” (OTT, 214).

people to reach their fullest potential, to live the greatest life. It means to constantly pray for the happiness of others and reach out and talk with them. Buddhism, I affirmed, teaches that this unwavering resolve enables the life state of Buddhahood to emerge and pulse within us.<sup>25</sup>

At that moment, I was reminded of Presidents Makiguchi and Toda.

Mr. Makiguchi identified the purpose of religion in society as “working for the happiness of humanity and making the world a better place,”<sup>26</sup> and Mr. Toda repeatedly voiced his impassioned wish to eradicate misery from the face of the earth.

The Soka Gakkai’s emergence is connected directly to the Buddha’s constant thought or wish, encapsulated in the words “At all times I think to myself.” It is an organization in perfect accord with the Buddha’s intent, carrying out the sacred and compassionate work of leading people to enlightenment as the shared vow of mentor and disciple. Mr. Toda regarded each Soka Gakkai member who dedicates themselves to sharing Buddhism as a Buddha.

As ordinary individuals, our members always dive in among the people and seek to elevate the life state of all humanity—to realize what we call worldwide kosen-rufu. They are noble practitioners of the bodhisattva way participating in a great religious movement. No gathering is more lofty or profound.

### **Expanding Our Grassroots Network of Bodhisattvas of the Earth**

We pray each day to realize a world of happiness exemplified by the words [we recite in gongyo] “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil,” and strive together to build a world of peace mirroring the words “constantly filled with heavenly and human beings. . . . Where living beings enjoy themselves at ease” (LSOC16, 272). Let us make even greater efforts to strengthen and expand our noble grassroots network of Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Let us advance with vibrant courage and optimism, exerting ourselves joyfully in the places where we have chosen to fulfill our vow for kosen-rufu!

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<sup>25</sup> Translated from Japanese. Jao Tsung-I and Daisaku Ikeda, *Bunka to geijutsu no tabiji* (A Journey on the Path of Culture and the Arts), (Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha, 2009), pp. 13–14.

<sup>26</sup> Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Soka kyoikugaku taikai* (The System of Value Creating Education), in *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu* (Collected Writings of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi), vol. 5 (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1982), p. 356.