

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

[13] "The Life Span of the Thus Come One" Chapter—Part 3 [of 3]

In this installment, we will study the section in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* discussing the "Life Span" chapter's verse portion. [...]

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.¹

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),² 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.

[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

¹ 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."

² 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.

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 ³ / 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.⁴ 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)

[...] The passage we are studying here discusses a sutra passage affirming that for those who believe in the Mystic Law, this saha world⁵ 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 life⁶ 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.⁷ 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

³ *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.

⁴ Earthly desires are inner workings or deluded impulses that cause suffering, distort our judgment, and obstruct our Buddhist practice.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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.

⁷ Five components are form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness.

that is safe and tranquil. For us, this is our realm of the 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. [...]

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. 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.⁸

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.⁹

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

[...] The sutra’s words “I am the father of this world” refer to the parable of the skilled physician and his sick children.¹⁰ Shakyamuni, like the father in that parable who is a physician, is “the father of all

⁸ Actual three thousand realms in a single moment of life: In the Latter Day, the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo revealed by Nichiren Daishonin is the actual teaching of three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ 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.

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).¹¹

Here, *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* highlights the three virtues of Shakyamuni by introducing a passage from the “Simile and Parable” (3rd) chapter¹² 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-renge-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. [...]

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). [...]

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. [...] 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. [...]

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.

¹¹ 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).

¹² 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).

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.

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). [...]

This familiar passage—which in Chinese comprises 20 characters—has magnificent power. [...] This passage [...] means to persistently and continually think about how to enable 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. [...]

Mr. Makiguchi identified the purpose of religion in society as “working for the happiness of humanity and making the world a better place,”¹³ 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. [...]

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. [...]

¹³ Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Soka kyoikugaku taikei* (The System of Value Creating Education), in *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo zenshu* (Collected Writings of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi), vol. 5 (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1982), p. 356.