

SGI Newsletter

Published by Soka Gakkai

No. 11597

Wednesday, August 14, 2024

President Ikeda's Study Lecture Series

THE BUDDHISM OF THE SUN—ILLUMINATING THE WORLD

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

[14] “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” Chapter

Engaging in Dialogue in a Spirit of Friendship and Activating the Goodness in Each Person's Heart

The story of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging¹—described in the Lotus Sutra—is one of reaching out to people day after day, talking with them and affirming the dignity and nobility of their lives. It is a tale of unwavering belief in people's innate potential and of showing each person the deepest respect.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's Buddhist practice wasn't anything complicated; he simply continued, with pure-hearted lifelong dedication, to bow in reverence to everyone he met. And as a result, he became a towering champion of humanity who was able to lead to enlightenment even those who had formerly persecuted him.

Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, declares that he is the votary, or genuine practitioner, of the Lotus Sutra who follows in the footsteps of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (see WND-1, 641). Now, we of the Soka Gakkai, following in the Daishonin's footsteps, are mirroring the actions of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in modern times—diving in among the people and reaching out with patience and inclusive hearts to embrace all. Soka mentors and disciples believe that all people possess the Buddha nature. We engage tenaciously in dialogue to bring out the inner goodness of those we encounter.

¹ Bodhisattva Never Disparaging appears in “The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging” (20th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. This bodhisattva—Shakyamuni in a previous lifetime—appeared at the end of the Middle Day of the Law following the death of the Buddha Awesome Sound King. He would bow to everyone he met and say: “I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you will all practice the bodhisattva way and will then be able to attain Buddhahood” (LSOC20, 308). He persevered in his practice of showing respect for all people, even when he was verbally and physically attacked by arrogant monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The sutra explains that this practice became the cause for Bodhisattva Never Disparaging to attain Buddhahood.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging would greet everyone, saying: “I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you will all practice the bodhisattva way and will then be able to attain Buddhahood” (LSOC20, 308). These words—known as the 24-character Lotus Sutra²—sum up the essence of the sutra’s teaching that all people have the potential for Buddhahood.

The Purpose of Shakyamuni’s Appearance in This World

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was baselessly criticized and attacked by arrogant people, but as his name “Never Disparaging” indicates, he never responded with disrespect or contempt.

The Daishonin writes:

The heart of the Buddha’s lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the “Never Disparaging” chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being. (WND-1, 851–52)

The fundamental purpose of the Buddha’s appearance in the world is to demonstrate proper “behavior as a human being,” and that is Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s behavior of showing profound respect for others [with the intent of leading them to Buddhahood]. Actions that express our respect for others out of our uncompromising belief in their Buddha nature constitute the supreme and unsurpassed Buddhist practice.

The heart of the practice of Nichiren Buddhism is our practice for self and others—that is, reciting gongyo and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo ourselves and sharing Buddhism with others. Amid the realities of society, we chant and spread the Mystic Law and engage in dialogues that respect the dignity of each person’s life and impart encouragement and hope. All these efforts are in fact the highest form of Buddhist practice, the root cause for activating the Buddha nature in ourselves and others.

The more that people believe in the inherent goodness of human beings, and the more we base our interactions on mutual respect, the stronger the current of respect for the dignity of life will become, spreading throughout the world. Ultimately, this will enable us to put an end to the cycle of conflict and hatred that seems to have defined the karma of humankind and open the way to a new era of mutual understanding and peace building.

² This passage is referred to as the 24-character Lotus Sutra because it consists of 24 characters in Kumarajiva’s Chinese translation and sums up the teaching of the Lotus Sutra that all people can attain Buddhahood.

The humanistic ideal embodied in the behavior of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is the model for action our world so desperately needs.

In this installment, we will study *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*' commentary on the "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" chapter. Together, let's reaffirm the significance of dialogue in helping people form connections to Nichiren Buddhism. I would like to start with the section of *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* that discusses the meaning of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's practice of showing respect for everyone he encounters.

**[Chapter Twenty: The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging
Thirty important points]**

Point One, regarding Bodhisattva [Constantly] Never Disparaging³

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: The word "Constantly" in the name [Constantly] Never Disparaging refers to the bodhisattva Never Disparaging who is constantly present in the three existences of past, present, and future. The name "Never Disparaging" refers to the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature that is present in the minds of all living beings. The Buddha nature is the Dharma nature.⁴ And the Dharma nature is Myoho-renge-kyo. (OTT, 150–51)

An Underlying Philosophy of Respect for Life

Here, the Daishonin states that the Chinese character "constantly" that appears in Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's name [but is not translated directly in English] indicates that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging constantly abides throughout the three existences of past, present, and future—throughout all time. We can interpret this as meaning that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging always appears in a troubled world—where people's minds are afflicted by delusion and many are consumed by anger⁵ and

³ The Chinese characters for Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's name in full (Jpn. *jo-fukyo bosatsu*) literally mean "constantly not disparaging bodhisattva." In English, "constantly not" is rendered as "never." Here, the Daishonin is commenting on the word "constantly," which does not appear separately in the English name.

⁴ Dharma nature: The unchanging nature inherent in all things and phenomena.

⁵ Anger is one of the three poisons—the other two being greed and foolishness—that give rise to

arrogance⁶—to illuminate the darkness of contempt for human beings with the light of respect for all.

The Daishonin then says: “The name ‘Never Disparaging’ refers to the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature that is present in the minds of all living beings” (OTT, 150–51). The insight and certainty that the Buddha nature is inherent in the lives of all people is the foundation for Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s practice of always revering others. As ordinary human beings, we tend to see people as manifesting one or another of the nine worlds, characterized by delusion. But the Buddha sees the Buddha nature inherent within all people.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says that all people possess the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature⁷—the innate Buddha nature, the wisdom to perceive it, and the good deeds, or practice, to develop this wisdom and cause the Buddha nature to emerge. This is the fundamental truth underlying the respectworthiness of all people and the ultimate principle motivating us to engage in the practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

Excavating the “Gold” of the Buddha Nature

All people possess the innate Buddha nature. However, even gold, if it remains buried in the ground, cannot reveal its value. Likewise, to mine the gold of the Buddha nature, we need good deeds, or practice, to develop wisdom and uncover the gold. This wisdom is what enables us to perceive the lustrous gold within us and to recognize its true value.

The defining characteristic of Buddhism is that it clarifies the way to activate the Buddha nature which, though inactive at the moment, exists innately within all people.

The ability to awaken and reveal the Buddha nature exists potentially within everyone, but the influence of another person is required to make an ordinary human being aware of that. What Buddhism calls a good friend⁸ is crucial for bringing forth the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature.

Only a good friend dedicated to the vow for kosen-rufu, who prays for a person’s happiness and teaches them about Buddhism, can awaken that person’s Buddha nature.

human suffering.

⁶ Arrogance here means falsely believing one has attained enlightenment and other benefits that one has not and thinking one is superior to others. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging lived at a time when there were many arrogant priests and Buddhism was on the verge of disappearing.

⁷ Three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature: A principle formulated by T’ien-t’ai (538–597) that views the Buddha nature from three perspectives. The three inherent potentials are the innate Buddha nature, the wisdom to perceive it, and the good deeds, or practice, to develop this wisdom and cause the Buddha nature to emerge. Beneficent actions aid the development of wisdom, and the developed wisdom realizes the innate Buddha nature. In this way, the three constitute causes that work together to enable one to attain the effect of Buddhahood.

⁸ In Buddhism a “good friend” is an upright, virtuous person who leads people to Buddhism. A mentor who teaches Buddhism and fellow practitioners are examples of good friends.

In some cases, it's as if that gold of the innate Buddha nature is buried deep in solid rock. But a good friend remains undeterred and keeps at it until they uncover the gold of happiness. Only through the patient, persevering efforts of such a good friend to connect them to Buddhism will a person finally awaken to their potential and become able to excavate their precious inner treasure with their own hands.

The Buddha Is Motivated by Compassion

In accord with the law of cause and effect that governs life, those who ridiculed and attacked Bodhisattva Never Disparaging underwent harsh retribution for their deeds. But as a result of hearing and forming a connection with the correct teaching through Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, they later encountered him again in another lifetime.⁹ This is an example of the Buddhist principle that forming even a reverse relationship¹⁰ with the Lotus Sutra [through slandering or opposing it] is ultimately a cause for the future attainment of enlightenment.

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings states:

Hence, although the people might “take sticks of wood or tiles and stones and beat and pelt him” (chapter twenty) [LSOC20, 309], he [Bodhisattva Never Disparaging] nevertheless persisted in his effort, “preaching to them forcefully, though it angered them” ([T’ien-t’ai’s] *Words and Phrases*, volume ten), an action that arose from his feelings of pity and compassion. . . . [W]e are taught that the Buddha mind is a mind of great pity and compassion. (OTT, 164)

Helping people from all walks of life form connections with Buddhism, even in challenging or adverse circumstances, exemplifies the spirit of compassion. This is the spirit of our dialogues as Soka Gakkai members. Sharing Buddhism to the best of our ability with courage, sincerity, and genuine concern for the other person is an action embodying the Buddha’s compassion. We substitute courage for compassion.

Also, we mustn’t overlook the fact that when people pelted him with tiles and stones, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging would retreat to a safe distance, then turn and call out to them in a loud voice: “I would never dare disparage you, for you are all

⁹ In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha explains: “The four kinds of believers, the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen, because anger arose in their minds and they treated me [as Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in a previous existence] with disparagement and contempt, were for two hundred million kalpas never able to encounter a Buddha, to hear the Law, or to see the community of monks [or *sangha*]. For a thousand kalpas they underwent great suffering in the Avichi hell. After they had finished paying for their offenses, they once more encountered the bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who instructed them in supreme perfect enlightenment” (LSOC20, 310–11).

¹⁰ Reverse relationship: Also, poison-drum relationship. A bond formed with the Lotus Sutra by opposing or slandering it. One who opposes the Lotus Sutra when it is preached will still form a relationship with it by virtue of opposition and will thereby attain Buddhahood eventually.

certain to attain Buddhahood!” (LSOC20, 309). Resilient, bold, upbeat, and wise, he was unperturbed by their angry and arrogant behavior. Crucially, his response came from an underlying compassionate prayer for others’ happiness.

Later in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin states: “Now Nichiren and his followers, practitioners of the Lotus Sutra who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are the bodhisattva Never Disparaging of the Latter Day of the Law” (OTT, 155). As the Bodhisattvas Never Disparaging of the Latter Day of the Law, in this saha world¹¹ dominated by mistrust and antagonism, we continue to chant and spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and redouble our efforts to help others form connections with Buddhism for the sake of happiness and peace.

Point Thirteen, concerning the passage “Gainer of Great Authority, at that time the four kinds of believers, the monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen, because anger arose in their minds and they treated me [as Bodhisattva Never Disparaging in a previous existence] with disparagement and contempt, were for two hundred million kalpas never able to encounter a Buddha, to hear the Law, or to see the community of monks [literally, the *samgha*, or community of practitioners]. . . .” [LSOC20, 310–11]

The “Buddha” spoken of in this passage, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, is an ordinary mortal and an ordinary priest. The “Law” is the daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]. The “community of monks” is we practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. We may be called Buddhas, and we may also be called ordinary priests, because “to have a profound realization of the perfect principle is called being a Buddha” (from volume seven of [T’ien-t’ai’s] *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*). The perfect principle is the Lotus Sutra. (OTT, 157)

Soka Gakkai Members Taking Action for Kosen-rufu Are Buddhas

This passage states that the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law is “an ordinary mortal and an ordinary priest” (OTT, 157).

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. In this context, the saha world indicates a world in which people must endure suffering.

Mr. Toda once discussed it in a lecture, saying: “Neither Bodhisattva Never Disparaging nor the Daishonin had the appearance of a magnificent, light-emanating Buddha. The Daishonin was an ordinary human being.”¹²

The principle that “ordinary people are identical with the highest level of being [i.e., Buddhahood]”¹³ (OTT, 22) defines the true nature of the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, affirming that genuine Buddhas are not superhuman beings.

Kosen-rufu is a struggle that advances through practitioners going out into society and, like Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, engaging with one individual after another and forging personal relationships. People who share and spread the Mystic Law for the sake of those who are suffering will attain Buddhahood. It has nothing to do with social status, titles, or recognition.

Action is most important. When we are active, the Mystic Law shines in our hearts.

Through his persistence in dialogue while showing profound respect for others, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging received the benefit of purifying his six sense organs¹⁴ and extended his life.

Purification of the Six Sense Organs Means Human Revolution

The purification of the six sense organs is taught in the preceding “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law” (19th) chapter, which encourages the propagation of the Lotus Sutra by explaining in concrete terms the benefits attained by practicing the sutra.

Purifying the six sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—means purifying one’s life. In contemporary terms, it is nothing other than human revolution.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin goes on to say:

[Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s] bow of obeisance [is] acknowledging the fact that “self” and “others” are in fact not two different things.

For this reason, when the bodhisattva Never Disparaging makes his bow of obeisance to the four kinds of believers [monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen], the Buddha nature inherent in the four kinds of believers of overbearing arrogance bows in obeisance to the bodhisattva Never Disparaging. It is like the

¹² Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda), vol. 6 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1986), p. 487.

¹³ This teaching that the supreme life state of Buddhahood exists within ordinary people who are afflicted by suffering and delusion is affirmed by the doctrine of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds elucidated in the Lotus Sutra.

¹⁴ When the six sense organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind—are purified, they function properly and are no longer affected by earthly desires or deluded impulses, thereby producing various benefits.

situation when one faces a mirror and makes a bow of obeisance: the image in the mirror likewise makes a bow of obeisance to oneself. (OTT, 165)

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging believed in the supremely noble Buddha nature within everyone he encountered, and bowed to them out of respect and reverence. When he did so, their Buddha nature bowed back to him, as if a reflection in a mirror. Such gestures of respect form a positive connection that mutually inspires and elevates the minds of both.

Mr. Toda said: “For the sake of kosen-rufu and establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land, we strive to help one person after another form a connection with Buddhism and guide them to happiness, while grappling with our own problems and difficulties. That is why we can attain Buddhahood. Our efforts bring immeasurable benefit and assure victory.”

[Point Twenty-three, concerning the bow of obeisance related to ignorance]

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: When one sets up distinctions between self and others, then the “others” are the four kinds of believers of overbearing arrogance, and the “I” is the bodhisattva Never Disparaging. To set up distinctions between good and bad by regarding the bodhisattva Never Disparaging as a “good” person and the arrogant ones as “bad” persons is a sign of ignorance.

But when one recognizes this and performs a bow of obeisance, then one is bowing in obeisance to Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the principle in which good and bad are not two different things, in which correct and incorrect are one and the same. (OTT, 162–63)

The Inherent Potential for Both Good and Evil

This next section from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* states that the dualistic view that sets up distinctions between good and bad, correct and incorrect, is in itself “ignorance.”¹⁵

¹⁵ Ignorance here refers the fundamental ignorance inherent in life, the most deeply rooted illusion, said to give rise to all other illusions. It is the inability to see or recognize the ultimate truth of the Mystic Law or the negative impulses that arise from such ignorance.

The Daishonin says it is a sign of ignorance to make distinctions between self and others, viewing Bodhisattva Never Disparaging as good and the arrogant four kinds of believers as evil. Here, he is telling us that simply distinguishing good from evil is not the essence of Nichiren Buddhism.

As he indicates when he cites the concepts that “good and bad are not two different things” and “correct and incorrect are one and the same” (OTT, 163), good and evil exist together within all people. Because of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds,¹⁶ through the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo we can make the fundamental ignorance within us dormant and activate the fundamental nature of enlightenment.¹⁷

History teaches us that religion, while in one regard seeking happiness for people, has all too often been a source of division and conflict. The Lotus Sutra embodies a wisdom that transcends the duality of good and evil and regards both good and evil as potentials within all human beings. These potentials lie dormant or emerge depending upon external causes and conditions. It holds that it is possible to activate the good and teaches the principles for doing that.

I explained this idea in a lecture at Italy’s University of Palermo¹⁸ in 2007:

I believe that the true value of creative, constructive dialogue is to be found in our effort to perfect and elevate our own lives, to suppress the manifestation of evil or negative aspects, and to foster and encourage the manifestation of good or positive aspects. This very effort underlies the kind of dialogue and communication that we are in such dire need of today.

Believing in Human Goodness

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’s behavior was always proactive, positive, and courageous. As it states in the Lotus Sutra, “If he happened to see any of the four kinds

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ Fundamental nature of enlightenment: Also, Dharma nature. The unchanging nature inherent in all things and phenomena. It is identified with the fundamental Law itself, the essence of the Buddha’s enlightenment, or ultimate truth, and the Buddha nature inherent in life.

¹⁸ On March 23, 2007, to commemorate its bicentennial, the University of Palermo in Sicily, Italy, presented President Ikeda with an honorary doctorate in communications. SGI Vice President Hiromasa Ikeda accepted the honor and read a lecture at the ceremony in Palermo on President Ikeda’s behalf, entitled “From the Crossroads of Civilization: A New Flourishing of Humanistic Culture.”

of believers far off in the distance, he would purposely go to where they were, bow to them, and speak words of praise” (LSOC20, 308–9).

Continually taking the initiative and encouraging others toward their inner transformation is our noble mission as emissaries of the Buddha. It is the essence of the Buddha’s own behavior. When we pray with profound determination, courage rises and we come up with creative and innovative ways to actively engage with others.

University of Denver professor Ved Nanda, a renowned authority on international law, described this present age, dominated by conflict and armed force, as “an era of mortal struggle for hope.”¹⁹ He went on to say: “I, too, have faith in the goodness of the human heart, and I believe that life itself is good. Though we may feel that modern society is enveloped in darkness, change presents ever-present possibilities. I believe in friendship and in people.”²⁰

Professor Nanda also had tremendous faith in Soka youth, saying: “It is clear that the work of these young people has been a significant force in solidifying the foundation for world peace.”²¹

Believing steadfastly in our own and others’ Buddha nature and following through with actions expressing profound respect for people are key to transforming this age of the Latter Day of the Law.

The practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is the path of dialogue to enable people to realize their full potential. When one young person after another embraces and carries on this practice, it will bring us steadily and surely closer to realizing world peace.

Toward a Year of Fresh Departure for a Youthful Soka Gakkai Worldwide

I still remember what my mentor, Mr. Toda, said to me one day as he looked out at the sunset sea in his hometown of Atsuta Village in Hokkaido: “It’s a big, wide world. There are still people who weep in anguish and children who cower in the crossfire of war. You must illuminate Asia and the entire world with the flame of the Mystic Law. You must do this in my place.”

And in his place, I worked with our members to open the way for worldwide kosen-rufu, sowing the seeds of peace of the Mystic Law everywhere I went. Now, as we approach [2024, which has been designated] the Year of Fresh Departure for a Youthful Soka Gakkai Worldwide, I would like to present our youthful Bodhisattvas of the Earth, whose hearts are one with mine, with the words my mentor said to me in the past, and ask that they strive “in my place.”

¹⁹ Ved Nanda and Daisaku Ikeda, *Our World To Make: Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Rise of Global Civil Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Dialogue Path Press, 2015), p. xv.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

Courageous Dialogue to Sow the Seeds of Buddhahood and Build Friendship

We have all emerged in the places of our mission due to our vow as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. We “follow in the footsteps” (WND-1, 641) of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, persevering in our practice of showing respect for others, undeterred by criticism and negativity.

Everywhere around the world, we are tenaciously engaging in dialogue based on friendship and courageously sowing the seeds of Buddhahood as Soka Bodhisattvas Never Disparaging. Through such efforts, we are creating a noble history of activating the goodness within the hearts of the global human family.

The curtain has now finally risen on the crucial seven years for securing an unshakable foundation for lasting world peace!

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

***This is the last study lecture presented by President Ikeda
before he passed away on November 15, 2023.***