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Key Passages from The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings

## [14] "The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" Chapter

In this installment, we will study *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings'* commentary on the "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging"<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup>

#### *Thirty important points*

#### Point One, regarding Bodhisattva [Constantly] Never Disparaging

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<sup>3</sup>. And the Dharma nature is Myohorenge-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 [...] 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–

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Dharmaanatuur: de onveranderlijke natuur die inherent aanwezig is in alle dingen en verschijnselen.

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 nature<sup>4</sup>—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 friend<sup>5</sup> 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. 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. [...]

### **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.<sup>6</sup> This is an example of the

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<sup>4</sup> 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. [...] [T]he three constitute causes that work together to enable one to attain the effect of Buddhahood.

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> 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 *samgha*]. 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).

Buddhist principle that forming even a reverse relationship<sup>7</sup> 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. . . . [..]. (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 certain to attain Buddhahood!” (LSOC20, 309). [...] 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 world<sup>8</sup> 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**

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<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> Saha world: This world, which is full of suffering. [...] In this context, the saha world indicates a world in which people must endure suffering.

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

The principle that “ordinary people are identical with the highest level of being [i.e., Buddhahood]”<sup>9</sup> (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 organs<sup>10</sup> and extended his life.

### **Purification of the Six Sense Organs Means Human Revolution**

[...] 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 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](#)

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> 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.

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 [...] states that the dualistic view that sets up distinctions between good and bad, correct and incorrect, is in itself “ignorance.”<sup>11</sup>

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....

[G]ood and evil exist together within all people. Because of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds,<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup> [...]

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.

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.

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<sup>11</sup> Ignorance here refers to 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.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> 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.