

## SGI President Ikeda's Study Lecture Series

### LEARNING FROM THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN: THE TEACHINGS FOR VICTORY

#### **“New Year's Goshō”**

#### **Ushering In a New Year Filled with Happiness and Hope<sup>1</sup>**

I have received a hundred slabs of steamed rice cake and a basket of fruit. New Year's Day marks the first day, the first month, the beginning of the year, and the start of spring. A person who celebrates this day will accumulate virtue and be loved by all, just as the moon becomes full gradually, moving from west to east, and as the sun shines more brightly, traveling from east to west.

First of all, as to the question of where exactly hell and the Buddha exist, one sutra states that hell exists underground, and another sutra says that the Buddha is in the west. Closer examination, however, reveals that both exist in our five-foot body. This must be true because hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother. . . . The pure lotus flower blooms out of the muddy pond, the fragrant sandalwood grows from the soil, the graceful cherry blossoms come forth from trees, . . . and the moon rises from behind the mountains to shed light on them. Misfortune comes from one's mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one's heart and makes one worthy of respect.

The sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of the New Year is like cherry blossoms blooming from trees, a lotus unfolding in a pond, sandalwood leaves unfurling on the Snow Mountains, or the moon beginning to rise. Now Japan, in becoming an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, has invited misfortune from a thousand miles away. In light of this, it is clear that those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra will gather fortune from ten thousand miles away. The shadow is cast by the form, and just as the shadow follows the form, misfortune will befall the country whose people are hostile to the Lotus Sutra. The believers in the Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, are like the sandalwood with its fragrance. (WND-1, 1137)

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<sup>1</sup> SGI Newsletter 9093.

## **Lecture**

A new era of worldwide kosen-rufu has begun with bright hope. [*SGI Newsletter Editors' Note: The SGI theme for 2014 is the "Year of Opening a New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu."*]

As Mother Earth embarks on another journey around the sun, courageous Bodhisattvas of the Earth, burning with a noble sense of mission, have risen into action with a great vow for kosen-rufu in 192 countries and territories.

Bodhisattvas of the Earth are the disciples who share the same spirit as the Buddha; they stand up with the same vow as their teacher and carry on their teacher's courageous and persevering actions.

We of the Soka family have ushered in the dawn of an exciting New Year, more determined than ever before to make a fresh start and advance anew.

"In life, one must have hope!"<sup>2</sup>—my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, declared in a New Year's message. He then went on to speak of the nobility of living out one's life with the great altruistic hope for the happiness for all humanity, refusing to be defeated by any adversity. Specifically citing the lofty life of Nichiren Daishonin, he noted with profound emotion: "The way that the Daishonin held fast to every one of his youthful hopes and dreams and brought them to fruition in his own life is a truly monumental achievement, shining like a magnificent palace."<sup>3</sup>

When I recall these words of my mentor, I am deeply struck anew by the phrase "magnificent palace."

### **Building a "Magnificent Palace" of Victory in Life**

Let us take the Daishonin's selfless dedication to fulfilling the great vow to propagate the Lotus Sutra as an eternal model and source of inspiration. Let us overcome every obstacle and each build a truly "magnificent palace" of victory in life, wherever we are around the globe.

Mr. Toda brought his New Year's message to a close as follows: "Let us plant our feet firmly on the ground and live with bright hope. At the same time, let us also help others plant their feet firmly on the ground and have bright hope in their lives as well."<sup>4</sup>

Let's advance with the strong resolve to make 2014 a year of brilliant hope and abundant happiness for ourselves and others.

In this installment, I will discuss the Daishonin's "New Year's Goshō," so that we can again study the essence of Nichiren Buddhism.

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Works of Josei Toda), (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 291. (New Year's message for 1957)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 292.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 292–93.

I have received a hundred slabs of steamed rice cake and a basket of fruit. New Year's Day marks the first day, the first month, the beginning of the year, and the start of spring.<sup>5</sup> A person who celebrates this day [based on the Mystic Law] will accumulate virtue and be loved by all, just as the moon becomes full gradually, moving from west to east,<sup>6</sup> and as the sun shines more brightly, traveling from east to west. (WND-1, 1137)

## Sincere Offerings for the New Year

The “New Year’s Goshō” is addressed to a follower named the wife of Omosu, who sent the Daishonin 100 steamed rice cakes and a basket of fruit one New Year.

The Japanese title translates literally as the “Steamed Rice Cake Goshō.” The Daishonin mentions steamed rice cakes in other writings as well,<sup>7</sup> always around the New Year. Steamed rice cakes were incised with a cross, so that they could be divided easily into smaller portions. They were part of the New Year celebration in the Daishonin’s time, just as they are in Japan today.

The recipient of this letter was the wife of Ishikawa no Hyoe,<sup>8</sup> also known as Lord Omosu, the steward of Omosu Village<sup>9</sup> in Fuji District of Suruga Province (part of present-day Shizuoka Prefecture). She was an elder sister of Nanjo Tokimitsu.<sup>10</sup> Omosu Village lay next to Ueno Village,<sup>11</sup> where Tokimitsu lived, making it easy for brother and sister to stay in contact with each other.

This letter is thought to have been composed in 1281 [at Minobu, the year before the Daishonin’s death]. Tokimitsu was facing great difficulties at the time [owing to the ongoing Atsuhara Persecution], forced by the authorities to pay heavy punitive taxes and supply unpaid labor simply because he was a follower of Nichiren Daishonin.

In addition, the wife of Omosu had lost a beloved daughter to illness in the spring of 1278. In another writing, the Daishonin refers to the daughter as “the young lady, the daughter of the lay priest Ishikawa no Hyoe” (WND-1, 902); it seems she was unmarried. The daughter

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<sup>5</sup> According to the Japanese lunar calendar, spring begins with the first month—that is, on New Year’s Day by that calendar, which on the Gregorian calendar falls somewhere between January 21 and February 19.

<sup>6</sup> This refers to the fact that the new moon is first seen in the west just after sunset. On successive nights, as the moon grows fuller, it appears to have moved a little farther toward the east.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, in “The Third Day of New Year” (WND-1, 1013).

<sup>8</sup> His full name was Ishikawa Shinhoye Yoshisuke.

<sup>9</sup> Present-day Kitayama in Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture.

<sup>10</sup> Nanjo Tokimitsu (1259–1332): A staunch follower of the Daishonin and the steward of Ueno Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province. He was the second son of Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro. His father died when he was seven years old. From the time the Daishonin took up residence on Mount Minobu, Nanjo Tokimitsu enjoyed a close relationship with the Daishonin, frequently receiving guidance from him. He played an admirable role defending the Daishonin’s followers during the Atsuhara Persecution, for which the Daishonin dubbed him “Ueno the Worthy.”

<sup>11</sup> Present-day Shimojo in Fujinomiya City, Shizuoka Prefecture.

had sent the Daishonin several letters and received guidance from him. Before she died, she wrote saying it would probably be her last letter to him and expressing her serene state of mind as she faced death (cf. WND-1, 902).<sup>12</sup> How brave and pure-hearted she was!

No doubt her mother greeted each New Year with the resolve to remain steadfast in her Buddhist practice as a disciple of Nichiren Daishonin, not only for her own sake but also on behalf of her departed daughter. As this New Year approached, she must have renewed that determination as she sent the Daishonin these offerings. The Daishonin in turn wholeheartedly praises her sincerity and vibrant resolve.

## **Making Every Day a Fresh Start**

New Year's Day marks the start of a new day, a new month, and a new year. In the East since ancient times, therefore, it has been known the day of "three beginnings." In Japan, according to the old lunar calendar, New Year's Day also marks the beginning of spring. All in all, it is a very festive day of many new beginnings.

The Daishonin says that a person who celebrates this day based on the Mystic Law will steadily accumulate virtue and benefit and come to be loved by all, just as the moon gradually grows fuller and the sun shines more brightly as it rises higher in the sky (cf. WND-1, 1173).

The first day of the New Year is a day of beginnings. Everyone can start the New Year with a fresh new determination. It is a wonderful opportunity to reawaken ourselves to the Buddhist spirit of "true cause"<sup>13</sup>—the spirit of always moving forward from the present moment on. When we do so, our lives are sure to overflow with irrepressible joy.

The Daishonin placed deep significance in the Chinese character *hajime*—meaning "first," "start," or "beginning." As one example, in "The Blessings of the Lotus Sutra," the Daishonin writes:

In this entire country of Japan, I am the only one who has been chanting Nam-myoho-  
renge-kyo. I am like the single speck of dust that marks the beginning of Mount  
Sumeru<sup>14</sup> or the single drop of dew that spells the start of the great ocean. (WND-1,  
672)

In the Japanese, *beginning* and *start* in this passage are written with the same character *hajime* mentioned earlier. I can't help but feel that the Daishonin's use of this character conveys his

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<sup>12</sup> In "The Teaching for the Latter Day," the Daishonin writes: "In one [letter] that reached me on the night of the fourteenth or fifteenth day of the third month [March 14 or 15], she [the daughter of Ishikawa no Hyoe] wrote, 'When I observe the world around me, it seems that even healthy people will be unable to survive this year. I have been ill for a long time, but my illness has suddenly worsened, and I imagine that this will be my last letter to you.' Has she then passed away after all?" (WND-1, 902).

<sup>13</sup> True cause: Also, the mystic principle of true cause. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism directly expounds the true cause for enlightenment as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which is the Law of life and the universe. It teaches a way of Buddhist practice of always moving forward from this moment on and overcoming all problems and difficulties based on this fundamental Law.

<sup>14</sup> Mount Sumeru: In ancient Indian cosmology, the mountain that stands at the center of the world.

impassioned spirit to stand alone and initiate an intense struggle for kosen-rufu.

In addition, he established for the first time the Gohonzon—the object of devotion for observing the mind. Embracing the Gohonzon itself constitutes “observing the mind,” or enlightenment.

In that sense, let us strive every day as we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo resonantly before the Gohonzon to begin anew, powerfully bringing forth fresh life force from within us. The purpose of our Buddhist practice is to lead lives of complete fulfillment, with the spirit that every day is New Year’s Day, and illuminated by the morning sun of time without beginning.

First of all, as to the question of where exactly hell and the Buddha exist, one sutra states that hell exists underground, and another sutra says that the Buddha is in the west. Closer examination, however, reveals that both exist in our five-foot body. This must be true because hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother. (WND-1, 1137)

## **Hell and Buddhahood Both Exist within Us**

The Daishonin must have regarded the wife of Omosu’s sincere spirit—her efforts to support him and keep striving based on faith—as incredibly noble and beautiful. To me, it seems he is saying that he saw the brilliantly shining Buddha in her heart.

In this letter, he is assuring her that the Buddha is not to be found somewhere far away, but is present within her own heart. He explains this ultimate essence of life, the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds<sup>15</sup>—one of the most important Buddhist doctrines—in an accessible way in the next section.

To illustrate his point, the Daishonin chooses as examples the life states of Hell and Buddhahood, the two extremes among the Ten Worlds. These states of life, which to our ordinary mortal eyes seem the farthest from our everyday existence, are actually both present within our hearts. From the perspective of the widely held notions of hell and the Buddha at the time, this was a radical departure.

The established Buddhist schools of the day commonly taught that hell was a realm located somewhere beneath the earth, and that the Buddha dwelled in some far distant realm—such as in the case of the Pure Land (Nembutsu) school’s Amida Buddha, who resided

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<sup>15</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 the world of Hell to the world of 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.

in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the west. It was widely believed, therefore, that when people died they either fell into an underground hell or were reborn in Amida's Pure Land. That is, both hell and the Buddha were regarded as states outside of and apart from oneself, one's life.

But in this writing, the Daishonin clearly states that both hell and the Buddha are right here "in our five-foot body" (WND-1, 1137) and "in the heart" (WND-1, 1137). First of all, by using the word "our," the Daishonin indicates that these states are within all of us, himself included, without any distinction or discrimination. Second, the world of Hell and Buddhahood are not far away. They exist in our lives, in the lives of real people living right here and now.

In explaining the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the Daishonin first gives an example of how the world of Hell is a potential within one's own life, describing it, for instance, as "the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother" (WND-1, 1137).

Naturally, there are all kinds of relationships between parents and children, and simply honoring one's parents isn't the solution to every problem. But the fact remains that without our parents, we would not exist in this world. Harboring unreasonable animosity toward the parents who gave birth to and lovingly nurtured us could lead to undermining the very foundation of our existence and negating the value of our own precious lives. If we lose that foundation, we could also end up losing our sense of self-worth and meaning, our self-confidence and hope. The Daishonin warns that this fundamental form of suffering represents the world of Hell and that it is a basic cause of unhappiness.

The law of cause and effect operating in the depths of life is strict. It may not be immediately clear when we just examine the causes, but they invariably produce effects, whether negative or positive. The Daishonin compares this to the lotus seed, which simultaneously contains both "blossom and fruit" (WND-1, 1137).<sup>16</sup>

## **The World of Buddhahood Also Exists within the World of Humanity**

In the following sentence, the Daishonin states: "The Buddha dwells within our hearts" (WND-1, 1137), and then he offers examples to explain the most difficult-to-comprehend fact that the world of Buddhahood also exists within the world of Humanity. He writes: "For example, flint has the potential to produce fire, and gems have intrinsic value" (WND-1, 1137). When cold flint is struck, it produces sparks. When gems are polished, they reveal their inherent worth. In the same way, though it is not immediately obvious, the life state of the Buddha most certainly resides within the lives of ordinary human beings, the Daishonin says.

He continues: "We ordinary people can see neither our own eyelashes, which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance" (WND-1, 1137). Our eyelashes are too close to our eyes

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<sup>16</sup> This characteristic of the lotus flower (*rengé*) symbolizes the principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect, which is core to the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. It indicates that at the deepest level, cause and effect are not separated by time but are present together simultaneously in each moment of life. It also indicates that the nine worlds are inherent in the world of Buddhahood and that Buddhahood is inherent in each of the nine worlds.

for us to see them, and the far reaches of space are too remote to be visible. In the same way, it is hard for us to believe and accept that the world of Buddhahood also exists within the world of Humanity.

The Daishonin acknowledges the fact that some may question how the supremely noble state of Buddhahood could possibly exist in the lives of ordinary people who are steeped in the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness.<sup>17</sup> In other words, it is quite difficult for most people to accept the truth that Buddhahood—the same unsurpassed life state of the Buddha—could in fact exist within the mortal body (lives) of ordinary people burdened with problems and sufferings.<sup>18</sup>

The most difficult aspect of the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is being convinced that the world of Buddhahood is contained within the world of Humanity—namely, that it exists right here in our lives, in our ordinary bodies and hearts.

In “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” the Daishonin writes:

The mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is as difficult to believe as fire existing in a stone or flowers within a tree. Yet under the right conditions such phenomena actually occur and are believable. To believe that Buddhahood exists within the human world is the most difficult thing of all—as difficult as believing that fire exists in water or water in fire. (WND-1, 359)

The pure lotus flower blooms out of the muddy pond, the fragrant sandalwood grows from the soil, the graceful cherry blossoms come forth from trees, . . . and the moon rises from behind the mountains to shed light on them. Misfortune comes from one’s mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one’s heart and makes one worthy of respect.

The sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of the New Year is like cherry blossoms blooming from trees, a lotus unfolding in a pond, sandalwood leaves unfurling on the Snow Mountains,<sup>19</sup> or the moon beginning to rise. (WND-1, 1137)

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<sup>17</sup> Three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness: The fundamental evils inherent in life that give rise to human suffering. In the renowned Mahayana scholar Nagarjuna’s *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, the three poisons are regarded as the source of all illusions and earthly desires. The three poisons are so called because they pollute people’s lives and work to prevent them from turning their hearts and minds to goodness.

<sup>18</sup> The Daishonin writes: “You may question how it is that the Buddha can reside within us when our bodies, originating from our parents’ sperm and blood, are the source of the three poisons and the seat of carnal desires. But repeated consideration assures us of the truth of this matter” (WND-1, 1137).

<sup>19</sup> Snow Mountains: A reference to various snow-covered mountains. In Buddhist scriptures, this name often refers to the Himalayas.

## **The Pure Lotus Blossoming from the Muddy Water**

How can it be that the supremely pure life state of Buddhahood exists in our impure physical bodies? The conclusion of the Daishonin's "repeated consideration" of this question is that indeed it does. To explain, he offers such analogies as the pure lotus flower blooming out of a muddy pond, the fragrant sandalwood growing from the soil, cherry blossoms coming forth from trees, and the moon rising from behind the mountains (cf. WND-1, 1337).

A lotus seed may be buried in mud for thousands of years, until, when conditions are right, it sprouts, grows, and sends forth buds. Cherry trees endure the harsh winter to blossom beautifully in spring. The Daishonin is saying that no matter how trying our circumstances, flowers of happiness will emerge from our lives and adorn us. These explanations must have been immensely encouraging to the wife of Omosu, who had experienced so many trials in life.

In his analogies of the lotus flower, sandalwood tree, and cherry blossoms, the Daishonin uses very active phrases such as "blooms out," "grows from," and "come forth," respectively. His description of a moon that "rises from" and "sheds light on" is likewise rich in action. Dormant potentials emerge and blossom, and they start functioning dynamically. In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin explains the term "attain Buddhahood," saying: "'Attain' means to open or reveal" (OTT, 126).

No doubt upon reading this part of the letter, the wife of Omosu was thrilled and delighted to learn that the pure and infinitely noble state of Buddhahood existed within her own life.

The fundamental causes of the emotions of happiness and suffering we experience are not something outside us, but exist ultimately in our hearts. The pain of hell and the limitless joy of Buddhahood are nowhere but within the depths of our own lives.

## **Misfortune Comes from One's Mouth and Fortune from One's Heart**

In the next sentence, the Daishonin discusses misfortune and fortune.

"Misfortune comes from one's mouth and ruins one" (WND-1, 1137), he states. A familiar Japanese proverb also says, "The mouth is the root of misfortune," but here the Daishonin is not merely imparting worldly advice. He is referring to the workings of cause and effect.

Shakyamuni Buddha offered a similar warning: "A person that is born is born with an axe in his mouth. He whose speech is unwholesome cuts himself with this axe."<sup>20</sup> The consequences of the negative karma we create with our mouths—for instance, in the form of derogatory remarks, defamatory speech, and lies—return to us and can bring about our ruin. This passage truly describes the painful suffering that results, manifesting in our lives as the world of Hell.

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<sup>20</sup> *The Sutta-nipata*, translated by H. Saddhatissa (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press Ltd., 1994), p. 77.



In contrast, “fortune comes from one’s heart and makes one worthy of respect” (WND-1, 1137), the Daishonin says. This is the Buddhist principle of happiness. The Daishonin teaches: “It is the heart that is important” (WND-1, 1000). We must strive to manifest our Buddhahood in our hearts and in our lives. As long as the Buddhahood within us remains intact, it will not be destroyed or swayed by external factors.

In early Buddhist scriptures, one of the many honorable titles by which Shakyamuni Buddha was known was “the Happy One.”<sup>21</sup>

The aim of Buddhism is to enable each of us to establish a state of absolute happiness.

Next, the Daishonin again mentions the sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the start of the New Year, underscoring how infinitely noble it is. He also likens such a sincere heart to “cherry blossoms blooming from trees, a lotus unfolding in a pond, sandalwood leaves unfurling on the Snow Mountains, or the moon beginning to rise” (WND-1, 1137), echoing his earlier analogies for Buddhahood.

The seed of Buddhahood had most certainly sprouted in the heart of the wife of Omosu, and the Daishonin was clearly aware of this.

Now Japan, in becoming an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, has invited misfortune from a thousand miles away. In light of this, it is clear that those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra will gather fortune from ten thousand miles away. The shadow is cast by the form, and just as the shadow follows the form, misfortune will befall the country whose people are hostile to the Lotus Sutra. The believers in the Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, are like the sandalwood with its fragrance. (WND-1, 1137)

### **Those Embracing the Mystic Law Are Sure to Become Happy**

The German poet Carl Busse (1872–1918) wrote: “‘Over the mountains, a distant journey hence, / happiness resides,’ the people say.”<sup>22</sup>

Where is happiness? Can we become happy? Our lives, and indeed the entire history of the human race, can be described in a certain sense as a ceaseless journey in search of the cherished goal of happiness.

Nichiren Daishonin declares: “Those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra will gather fortune from ten thousand miles away” (WND-1, 1137). Here, the Daishonin assures us that when we believe in the Lotus Sutra (the Gohonzon) and live out our lives to the best of our

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<sup>21</sup> The Pali term is *sugata*, and is translated variously as the Happy One, Well-Gone One, Well-farer, Well Gone, Well Attained, and so on.

<sup>22</sup> Translated from German. Carl Busse, “Ueber den Bergen . . .” (Over the Mountains), *Neue Gedichte* (New Poems), (Stuttgart: Verlag der J. G. Cotta’schen Buchhandlung, 1896), p. 70.

ability, we are certain to become happy. We will never sink into misery but attain happiness without fail.

No matter what our present situation, no matter how things have been in our lives up to now, if we persevere earnestly in faith we will enjoy unsurpassed good fortune and benefit beyond measure and lead lives of deep fulfillment.

“Those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra” means those who bring forth the world of Buddhahood inherent in their “five-foot body” and “in their heart.” Such people have entered the great path of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. With their lives shining like the noblest of Buddhas, they can never be unhappy.

We ourselves embody happiness. No one can take that happiness away. No one can destroy it. As practitioners of the Mystic Law, we possess an incredibly strong “magnet” that attracts good fortune and happiness. That is why the heavenly deities and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three existences gather around to protect us.

With the most powerful life force, one can stand surrounded by good fortune and dwell at ease in a beautiful “magnificent palace” of happiness. Such happiness is not self-centered. Rather, it is an inexhaustible happiness, happiness that can embrace both oneself and others.

“The believers in the Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, are like the sandalwood with its fragrance” (WND-1, 1137), says the Daishonin. The lives of those who dedicate themselves to the Mystic Law emit the wonderful fragrance of good fortune and benefit, which enfolds not only themselves but others as well.

Embraced by the Daishonin’s vast state of life, the wife of Omosu must have felt a great sense of hope and confidence growing within her heart.

### **The SGI Is a Gathering of “Experts in the Art of Happiness”**

The Russian author Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), in his famous novel *War and Peace*, tells of a central character who, while being held captive and stripped of all freedom, awakens to the fact that human beings are created for happiness and that happiness lies within.<sup>23</sup>

It is an immense source of pride for me that so many of my beloved members in Japan and around the world say that, through practicing Nichiren Buddhism, they have become happier than they could ever have imagined possible. Cherishing the Daishonin’s words, “Those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra will gather fortune from ten thousand miles away” (WND-1, 1137), there are now countless “experts in the art of happiness” in the SGI, who have triumphed over the darkness of karma and suffering such as financial hardship, illness, trouble with relationships, and personality problems.

The Mystic Law is the great teaching that enables us to transform any hardship into happiness, as the Daishonin assures us when he says: “Misfortune will change into fortune” (WND-1, 412). Nichiren Buddhism enables those who have suffered the most to attain the greatest happiness.

Mr. Toda solemnly observed that people’s lives can move in either of two directions:

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*, translated by Rosemary Edmonds (London: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 1255.

toward decline and ruin, or toward improvement and growth.

During the early days of our movement, there were many women whose lives before joining the Soka Gakkai were so filled with suffering that they had forgotten the very word “happiness.” Others, hearing at a discussion meeting that practicing Nichiren Buddhism would enable them to become happy without fail, felt a flame of hope ignite in their lives for the first in a very long time.

None became happy overnight. They all made incredible efforts. They all struggled. They all strove wholeheartedly. Some nights they chanted daimoku through their tears. But these were by no means tears of despair. Rousing courage, they pledged not to be defeated and to definitely become happy. They transformed the darkness of misfortune and made the sun of hope and happiness rise in their lives.

Nor was their experience limited to themselves. Throughout Japan and around the world, members have been enacting dramas of transforming karma, and thereby illuminating the lives of all around them. These are the victorious dramas of Soka.

### **Building a Society of Respect for Life and Human Beings**

In closing, I would like to speak from a broader perspective.

At the beginning of this section, we find the words, “Now Japan” (WND-1, 1137). This shows that the Daishonin was concerned not only with the happiness of individuals, but that he also directed his attention to the nation and society at large.

The Daishonin points out the one factor that determines the direction of not only each individual but of the nation and society as a whole: that is, whether people are enemies of the Lotus Sutra or whether they have faith in the Lotus Sutra. If we express this in contemporary terms, it means that everything depends on whether the principles of respect for the dignity of life and respect for human beings taught in the Lotus Sutra become the spirit of the age, or whether society descends into a callous, coldhearted era in which life is devalued and people disrespected.

The Daishonin says: “Now Japan, in becoming an enemy of the Lotus Sutra, has invited misfortune from a thousand miles away” (WND-1, 1137). If, as believed, this letter was composed in 1281, it was a time when people were extremely worried about the possibility of a second Mongol invasion. And in fact, that invasion did take place that year [in April]. We can surmise here that the Daishonin was not making an obscure assumption, but was speaking directly to the fear and anxiety that must have filled the country at that time.

But his message is also that “believers in the Lotus Sutra” will never be swept away by a swirling tide of misfortune, no matter how bleak the times or the situation in society may be. The network for good formed by people who embrace the Lotus Sutra can break the cycle of misery afflicting a nation and redirect it toward peace and security. The disciples of Nichiren Daishonin have the mission of fundamentally transforming times of misfortune and misery through the philosophy of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.”

## Humanism Is the Basis of the SGI

Forty years ago (in September 1974), I visited Russia, Tolstoy's homeland, for the first time. It was then still the Soviet Union, a socialist state. Many criticized my decision to go, asking why a religious leader would visit an atheist country. My answer was simple: "Because there are people there. I will go anywhere that there are people!" With this commitment, I embarked on my trip to the Soviet Union, which for me is a treasured memory.

During my visit, Soviet premier Aleksey Kosygin (1904–80) asked me: "What is your basic ideology?" Without hesitation, I replied: "I believe in peace, culture, and education—the underlying basis of which is humanism."

We of the SGI have advanced with a positive spirit based on those beliefs. SGI members, in their respective places and societies, have raised high the banner of humanism and brought great flowers of value creation to bloom.

The "believers in the Lotus Sutra" of which the Daishonin spoke are today none other than us, the mentors and disciples of Soka. Dedicated to realizing the great vow for kosen-rufu as proud followers of Nichiren Daishonin, we are the harmonious body of believers (*samgha*), united in the spirit of "many in body, one in mind." Today, in the 21st century, all around the globe, we are clearly demonstrating the truth of his declaration that "those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra will gather fortune from ten thousand miles away" (WND-1, 1137).

Looking at our present human world in light of the Daishonin's words, I wish simply to ask: What is it that truly constitutes fortune or happiness today?

## Happiness Is Found in Creating Value

First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi came to see that happiness in life is found in creating value. If that is the case, then our efforts to create value by spreading the flowers of culture, the light of education, and the way to peace based on Buddhist humanism constitute the work of bringing fortune and happiness to the entire world.

It is you, the outstanding members of the SGI, who are shouldering this enormous task. As "human flowers" whose "fragrance is like the sandalwood" (cf. WND-1, 1137), you embrace everyone around you with your warm smiles and gain the trust of all.

The fanfare announcing the opening of a new era of worldwide kosen-rufu has sounded. A wonderful age has arrived.

My trustworthy fellow members! My dear young friends! Burning with a passionate new vow for kosen-rufu, let us continue our courageous struggle together again this year!

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