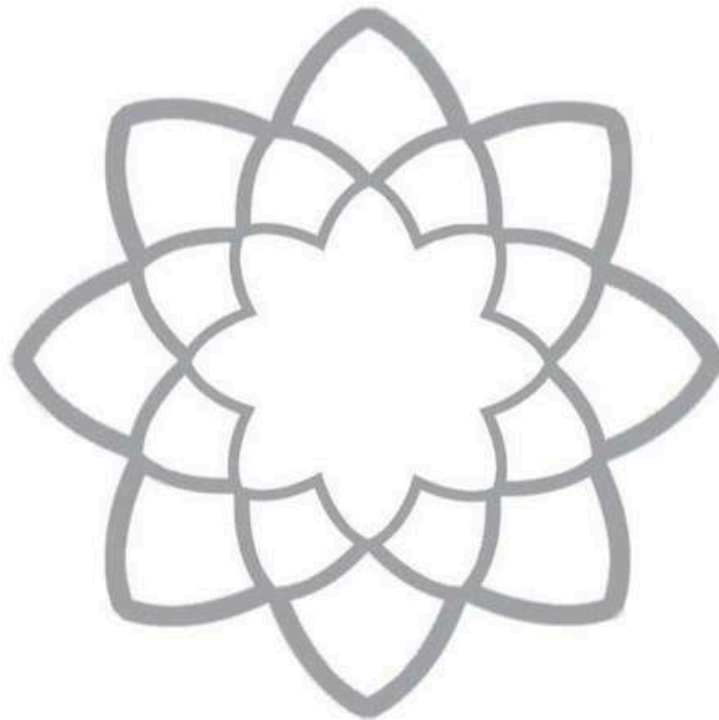


SGI Netherlands

Study Exam Grade 2

2025



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Message from Hideki Iwami

Thank you for wanting to deepen your understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism through this SGI study exam. I am sure that all your efforts will bring deeper awareness of the empowering philosophy of Buddhism as well as greater joy through your Buddhist practice.

In a recent study lecture, SGI President Ikeda made a really important point about study. He wrote, 'I am certain that your enthusiasm in the noble pursuit of Buddhist study will spread to those around you and contribute to steadily transforming the spiritual foundation of society.' (*SGI Newsletter* No. 10166)

This quotation shows the important effect of being involved in the study movement. When we study with growing enthusiasm, Sensei tells us, the effect of this will even change the foundation of society. The philosophy of respect for the dignity of life will spread through each of us to make a difference for everyone around us in the wider world.

I am very grateful to the Study Courses Committee of SGI-UK's Study Department for their hard work refining and improving the process and the material for this year's course.

I am sure you will enjoy being involved in this course, and that you will see how the ideas of Nichiren Buddhism can make a difference not only in your own life, but also the world around you.

Warm wishes,

Hideki Iwami

General Director SGI Netherlands

Introduction

The SGI Nederland Grade 2 study course builds on the understanding that you have established through studying the Grade 1 course.

Grade 2 involves the same process as the Grade 1 course - your own independent study. Studying together with others, supported by your coach, is important, as we are able to expand our understanding of Buddhist principles beyond our own limited perspective and we also remember that a key purpose of study is not the mere accumulation of knowledge but deepening our faith and sharing the Law with others.

This Grade 2 course has four sections through which you will focus on some key topics:

Section A: The Lotus Sutra

Nichiren Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra and the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Section B: 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life'

Nichiren Daishonin's Gosho, 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life'.
SGI President Ikeda's lectures on 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life', exploring in particular many in body, one in mind, and the oneness of mentor and disciple.

Section C: 'The Three Kinds of Treasure'

SGI President Ikeda's lecture on Nichiren Daishonin's Gosho 'The Three Kinds of Treasure', exploring in particular the treasures of the heart and our behaviour as human beings.

Section D: The priesthood issue

Repudiating the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood under Nikken.

Studying for an exam helps us to challenge ourselves in a deeper way than we would otherwise be likely to. The Grade 2 exam is a step up from Grade 1, requiring a thorough grasp of the study material which will be tested through a wider range of questions than the Grade 1 multiple choice format, and will involve short and longer written answers. However, we have provided an online support pack with sample questions to guide your local and personal study sessions and all the questions in the final exam will be sourced from there. Here are some examples:

Example 1

Question: The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are described as emerging 'breaking through the earth'. What does this symbolise for the individual? (1 mark)

What does this symbolise for society? (1 mark)

Answers drawn from text: The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are eternal activists who base themselves on the Mystic Law; theirs are lives of eternal advancement. Our summoning forth the bounding energy of these bodhisattvas constitutes the 'emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth' within our own being. (1 mark)

When we do this, we can break through the shell of the small self that has hitherto constrained our lives. (1 mark)

...It comes down to people revolutionising their state of life. (1 mark) From a broad perspective, our efforts to cause countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth to emerge – to help many people revolutionise their lives – amount to a struggle to change the state of life of society at large. It is a struggle to elevate the state of all humankind. (1 mark) Isn't this the transformation that 'breaking through the earth' symbolises?

(Up to 2 marks can be given in total – 1 for either of the first 2 points relating to the individual, and 1 for either of the remaining points for society. Answers are drawn from the text but can be expressed in the candidate's own words.)

Example 2

Question: What is the true meaning of 'heritage of the Law' in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism? (2 marks)

How is this understood differently in the Nikken sect? (2 marks)

Answers drawn from text: 'Heritage' or 'lineage' in Nichiren Buddhism has always been something open to all people, not the exclusive possession of an elite few. (1 mark)

...in 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life', the Daishonin writes, 'Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood.' (WND-1, p. 217)

In Nichiren Buddhism, the heritage is ultimately described as the 'heritage of faith' (WND-1, p. 218), that is, as faith itself. (1 mark)

On the other hand, the Nikken sect claims a mysterious, exclusive heritage that, upon receipt, automatically makes one a Buddha regardless of faith or practice. (1 mark) This is far removed from the essential meaning of the heritage of faith, the heritage taught by the Daishonin.

...Nikken and his followers hold an erroneous view of heritage which is the source of their notion that the high priest is absolute.

That view is as follows: There exists a mysterious heritage or lineage that is passed on only from one high priest to the next. Simply by receiving that lineage, one exclusively inherits the Buddha's enlightenment and the essence of the Buddha's Law itself. (1 mark)

...the Nikken sect states that the transmission of the 'heritage of the Law' entrusted to only one person is surely the entity that embodies the 'oneness of person and Law'.

(Up to 4 marks can be given in total. A candidate can get full marks even if they focus their answer on just one aspect of the heritage of the Law and how it is explained differently in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism compared with the Nikken Sect. Answers are drawn from the text but can be expressed in the candidate's own words.)

We very much hope that you will enjoy studying this course, taking the exam and sharing your experience with others!
The Study Department

Section A: The Lotus Sutra Study material part 1

Nichiren Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra

From the SGI Study department series 'The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism for the New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu' (SGI Newsletter No. 7198 and extracts from SGI Newsletter No. 10056)

The Lotus Sutra is a scripture that embodies the essence of Mahayana Buddhism. It teaches unequivocally that all people can attain Buddhahood. This section will explain the significance and major doctrines of the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra has radically changed the Buddhist view of life and of Buddhahood. The sutras Shakyamuni preached during the more than forty years before the Lotus Sutra teach that ordinary people cannot attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

Moreover, they stay in one of nine worlds other than Buddhahood until they die and only then can move to another in rebirth. Therefore, if people wish to attain Buddhahood, they have to carry out Buddhist practices through numerous lifetimes until they eradicate all of their earthly desires, purify their lives, and obtain benefit and virtue worthy of Buddhas. Then and only then can they attain Buddhahood. When they succeed, the sutras state, none of the nine worlds remain in their lives because they are replaced by Buddhahood.

However, in the Lotus Sutra Shakyamuni reveals the truth that Buddhahood exists inherently in the lives of ordinary people, and that everyone can attain Buddhahood immediately by bringing it forth from within their lives.

This teaching of the Lotus Sutra is founded on two doctrines: the 'true aspect of all phenomena' and the 'attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past'

The true aspect of all phenomena

The Lotus Sutra, which consists of twenty-eight chapters, can be divided into two distinct parts: the theoretical teaching, which equates to the first fourteen chapters, and the essential teaching, the latter fourteen chapters.

Two doctrines central to the theoretical teaching (the first half) are the 'true aspect of all phenomena' and the 'attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles'.

The true aspect of all phenomena is a principle expounded in the 'Expedient Means' (2nd) chapter of the sutra. 'All phenomena' here means the world around us and its various workings, including the affairs of life and society. 'True aspect' means their ultimate reality or true essential nature. The truth or reality of all things that Buddhas, through their vast and profound wisdom, are able to perceive is called the true aspect of all phenomena. Once one perceives this reality, one understands that all phenomena and their true aspect are not two separate things, but that all phenomena are in fact manifestations or expressions of the true aspect. Therefore, all phenomena and their true aspect can never be divided or separated.

Based on the commentaries of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, Nichiren Daishonin clarified

that 'all phenomena' refers specifically to all living beings of the Ten Worlds and their respective environments, whereas the 'true aspect' refers to Myoho-enge-kyo.

In his work 'The True Aspect of All Phenomena', the Daishonin states that 'all beings and environments in the Ten Worlds, from hell, the lowest, to Buddhahood, the highest, are without exception manifestations of Myoho-enge-kyo.' (WND-1, p. 383)

The teaching of the true aspect of all phenomena reveals that not only Buddhas, but the beings of the other nine worlds are all equal because each of the Ten Worlds possesses all of the ten and are essentially embodiments of Myoho-enge-kyo.

Prior to the Lotus Sutra, it was thought that a practically insurmountable gap lay between a Buddha and an ordinary person; that is, between the life-state of Buddhahood and the other nine worlds.

However, the Lotus Sutra takes the opposite view. While Buddhas and ordinary people of the nine worlds take on different appearances and qualities in terms of their roles and behaviour in the real world, on the level of life itself they are essentially the same, with no distinction between them. Beings of the nine worlds, whatever their present condition or state of life, are all in principle capable of attaining Buddhahood.

Based on the principle of the true aspect of all phenomena, the Lotus Sutra reveals that persons of the two vehicles (voice hearers and cause-awakened ones) can in fact become Buddhas, although the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings denied their possibility of attaining Buddhahood.

Furthermore, the Lotus Sutra also guarantees the attainment of Buddhahood by evil persons, as well as the attainment of Buddhahood by women – two groups that were also denied the possibility of enlightenment in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

The 'Expedient Means' chapter goes on to explain that the reason or purpose for which all Buddhas appear in this world is to 'open the door of Buddha wisdom' for all people, to 'show the Buddha wisdom' to them, to 'cause them to awaken to the Buddha wisdom' and to 'induce them to enter the path of Buddha wisdom'. (cf.

LSOC, p. 64)

In other words, the fundamental wish of Shakyamuni and all other Buddhas is to enable all people to reveal the Buddha wisdom, inherent equally in everyone's life, and to carry out Buddhist practice

based on that wisdom. In this way, they aim to enable all people to achieve a state of life equal to that of the Buddhas themselves. This is conveyed in the Lotus Sutra by Shakyamuni's statement of his long-held vow 'to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us'. (LSOC, p. 70) This is the fundamental purpose of Buddhism.

The attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past

A principle central to the essential teaching (the latter half) of the Lotus Sutra is the revelation of Shakyamuni's attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past.

In the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings up through the theoretical teaching (the first half) of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni is described as follows: he was born a prince of the country of the

Shakya clan in ancient India, but left home to pursue a religious life, and after a period of ascetic practices attained enlightenment, or Buddhahood, for the first time while seated in meditation under the Bodhi tree on the outskirts of Gaya (later called Bodhi Gaya). According to those teachings, the causes he had made and accumulated through many lifetimes of Buddhist practice had resulted in his obtaining the rewards of benefit and virtue that enabled him, in his present life in India, to attain Buddhahood. But his revelation that he had actually attained enlightenment in the distant past fundamentally overturned that existing image. As explained earlier, the teaching of the 'true aspect of all phenomena' in the theoretical teaching reveals that there is no essential difference between a Buddha and an ordinary person, because both are embodiments of Myoho-enge-kyo. In other words, while Buddhahood is inherent in the lives of ordinary people, and anyone can attain Buddhahood at any time, it would actually require practice over numerous lifetimes to do so. In the theoretical teaching, even Shakyamuni is seen as having attained Buddhahood only after an unimaginably long period of practice, and so disciples would naturally have to carry out the same practice as their teacher.

In contrast, the essential teaching, through the example of Shakyamuni attaining enlightenment in the remote past, explains that Buddhahood, along with other nine worlds, is permanently inherent in the lives of all people, and that they can manifest Buddhahood at any moment under the right conditions.

The 'Life Span' (16th) chapter offers a description of a period known as 'numberless major world system dust particle kalpas' to explain the vastness of the time that has passed since Shakyamuni originally attained Buddhahood. This overturned the accepted view that Shakyamuni had attained enlightenment for the first time during his lifetime in India, and it revealed him to be the eternal Buddha who had been enlightened since the remote past. It also explains that since that time he has always been present in this impure saha world.

The chapter says, 'It has been immeasurable, boundless hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas since I in fact attained Buddhahood.' (LSOC, pp. 265-66) This signifies that the life-state of the Buddha is eternal and always present.

After revealing his original enlightenment in the remote past, Shakyamuni states, 'Originally I practised the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed.' (LSOC, p. 268) This means that the nine worlds, represented by the life-state of a bodhisattva, are also eternal and always present.

The above two passages mean that both the life-state of Buddhahood and that of the nine worlds are forever present in Shakyamuni's life.

Before the Lotus Sutra clarified that Shakyamuni had attained Buddhahood in the remote past, it was taught that, before becoming a Buddha in India, he had purged the nine worlds and their delusions from his life.

In contrast, Shakyamuni's revelation of his original enlightenment shows that all of the other nine worlds are inherent within the world of Buddhahood in his life. Therefore, he was able to appear as a bodhisattva taking various forms as he carried out Buddhist practice

in subsequent lifetimes in the past. But even while appearing and acting as a bodhisattva, Buddhahood always existed within his life. In this way he embodied the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

Shakyamuni, the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past, is in fact free from the endless cycle of birth and death, but in order to cause people to seek his teachings, he passes away. He states in the 'Life Span' chapter, 'As an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana but in truth I do not pass into extinction.' (LSOC, pp. 270-71)

Further, the sutra explains that this eternal Buddha always dwells in the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, which is none other than this *saha* world where ordinary people of the nine worlds live. (This is known as the principle that the *saha* world is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.) He appears whenever and wherever there are people who seek the Buddha single-mindedly and strive in Buddhist practice without begrudging their lives. In other words, when one believes in and practises the Lotus Sutra, one's innate Buddhahood emerges, and at the same time one's environment becomes a Buddha land. This is because everyone's life is inherently endowed with the state of a Buddha. This innate Buddha nature functions as the internal cause, which, in response to the right conditions, brings about, at any time or any place, the reward of Buddhahood in one's own being and in the environment.

It is the principle of Shakyamuni's attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past that sheds light on the true nature of life; namely that, from the most distant past into the limitless future, everyone is essentially a Buddha.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth

In the 'Emerging from the Earth' (15th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni summons countless bodhisattvas for the purpose of entrusting them with the propagation of his teaching in the evil age after his passing. Because the sutra depicts them as emerging in vast numbers from beneath the ground, they are known as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and are considered to have been dwelling in the realm of fundamental truth.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are countless in number, each leading an entourage of followers as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges, the greatest and most venerated river in India.

These bodhisattvas had been constantly taught and instructed by Shakyamuni since the remote past, and had already come to uphold the fundamental teaching for attaining Buddhahood.

Possessing within them the same enlightened life-state as Shakyamuni, they are charged with the mission to widely spread the Mystic Law in the evil age known as the Latter Day of the Law.

They are led by four bodhisattvas – Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices and Firmly Established Practices. In the 'Supernatural Powers' (21st) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Superior Practices and all these bodhisattvas vow to spread the great Law after Shakyamuni's passing. In response to their vow, Shakyamuni entrusts them with propagating

his teaching in the age after his passing, charging them with transmitting the great Law into the future.

In view of these sutra passages, two major questions still remain. That is, when after Shakyamuni's passing will the Bodhisattvas of the Earth actually appear, and what exactly is the great Law they will spread when they do?

Nichiren Daishonin makes it clear that the time when the Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear is in the Latter Day of the Law, and the great Law they will spread is the Mystic Law, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Daishonin himself fulfilled the instructions contained in this entrustment of the teachings by Shakyamuni described in the Lotus Sutra. That is, it is the Daishonin who appeared at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, taught Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to all people, and spread it with selfless dedication. In this sense, the Daishonin is himself a Bodhisattva of the Earth, whose role accords in particular with that of their leader, Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

In 'The True Aspect of All Phenomena', Nichiren Daishonin writes:

"Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be known as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. And if you are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt that you have been a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha from the remote past." (WND-1, p. 385)

This passage explains that everyone who accepts and believes in the Daishonin's teachings, propagates them, and works to achieve kosen-rufu is without exception a Bodhisattva of the Earth. That person is a genuine disciple of Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging

The practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging described in the 'Never Disparaging' (20th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra serves as an example of how to spread the correct teaching in the evil age after Shakyamuni's passing.

Never Disparaging is one of the figures appearing in the Lotus Sutra who depicts Shakyamuni as he carried out Buddhist practices in a former lifetime. He consistently venerates everyone he encounters, no matter who they are, including even those who attack or persecute him, bowing in respect and reciting to each phrase known as the twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra. This name derives from the fact that the phrase consists of twenty-four Chinese characters in the sutra's text and expresses the essence of the Lotus Sutra's teachings and practice. It reads, 'I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you will all practise the bodhisattva way and will then be able to attain Buddhahood.' (LSOC, p. 308) These words plainly demonstrate the Lotus Sutra's essential philosophy, which is to respect the life of any and every person

because each inherently possesses the Buddha nature.

While preaching this ‘twenty- four-character Lotus Sutra’, Never Disparaging is attacked by arrogant people who throw rocks and hit him with sticks, but he perseveres in his practice of consistently praising them and treating them with respect. The sutra explains that it was through the benefit deriving from these actions that Never Disparaging became a Buddha.

The Latter Day of the Law is described as an age of contention or conflict. And the only way to resolve conflict and create a society of humanity and peace is for each person to believe in the Buddha nature of both themselves and others, and to consistently act in a manner that shows respect for people. Buddhism teaches the loftiest form of human behaviour – actions that respect others – and encourages all people to act in this manner.

Regarding the importance of human behaviour, Nichiren Daishonin states:

“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 behaviour as a human being.” (WND-1, pp. 851-52)

Here the Daishonin is clearly stating that the purpose of Buddhism is to behave as Never Disparaging did, that is, to believe in one’s own Buddha nature and that of others and act in accord with that belief.

Nichiren Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra

In the Latter Day of Law, it is inevitable that those who spread the Lotus Sutra will encounter great difficulties. Nichiren Daishonin propagated the Lotus Sutra and encountered major persecutions for doing so, just as the sutra predicted. In this way, he ‘read’ the Lotus Sutra with his very life and fulfilled the role of the ‘votary of the Lotus Sutra’ who proves the validity of the sutra’s teachings.

The votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law

Nichiren Daishonin referred to himself as the ‘votary of the Lotus Sutra’ – the genuine practitioner of the sutra who carried out its teachings exactly as instructed while facing and overcoming great persecutions in order to propagate the Mystic Law. The Lotus Sutra explains that anyone who believes in, practises and spreads the sutra’s teaching after Shakyamuni’s passing will be assailed by various kinds of obstacles and persecutions.

Suffering extreme hatred and jealousy

In the 'Teacher of the Law' (10th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra is the passage, 'Since hatred and jealousy towards this sutra abound even when the thus come one [Shakyamuni Buddha] is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?' (LSOC, p. 203)

In the Latter Day of the Law, it was only Nichiren Daishonin who experienced persecutions motivated by intense hatred and jealousy surpassing those directed at Shakyamuni in his time.

The six difficult and nine easy acts

The 'Emergence of the Treasure Tower' (11th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes 'six difficult and nine easy acts'. Through these examples, Shakyamuni emphasises the great difficulty of accepting and spreading the Lotus Sutra in the time after his passing, and calls on bodhisattvas to make a vow to propagate the sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.

The six difficult acts are (1) to propagate the Lotus Sutra widely, (2) to copy it or cause someone else to copy it, (3) to recite it even for a short while, (4) to teach it even to one person, (5) to hear of and accept it and enquire about its meaning and (6) to maintain faith in it.

The nine easy acts include 'taking up Mount Sumeru and hurling it across countless Buddha lands', 'placing the earth on one's toenail and ascending to the Brahma Heaven', 'walking across a burning prairie carrying a bundle of hay on one's back without being burned' and 'preaching eighty-four thousand teachings'.

While the nine 'easy' acts appear impossibly difficult, they are to be considered easy when compared with the difficulty of the six acts connected with spreading the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.

The reason that propagating the Lotus Sutra is so difficult is that doing so invites very real hardships in the form of opposition and persecution. In explaining things in terms of the six difficult and nine easy acts, the sutra is strongly expressing Shakyamuni's spirit and intent in encouraging the propagation of its teachings, the most difficult among difficult endeavours, in the age after his passing.

The three powerful enemies

The 'Encouraging Devotion' (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra contains a passage known as the 'twenty-line verse' describing three kinds of people who strongly oppress those who spread the sutra after Shakyamuni's passing. Collectively, they are called the 'three powerful enemies'. They are defined as arrogant lay people, arrogant priests and arrogant false sages.

The first of the three powerful enemies, arrogant lay people, refers to people who, ignorant of the Buddhist teachings, attack the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. Because the Daishonin endeavoured to spread the Lotus Sutra, such people slandered him and attacked him with swords and staves, just as the sutra predicted.

The second powerful enemy, arrogant priests, indicates members of the Buddhist

clergy who persecute the Lotus Sutra's practitioners. In the Daishonin's time, Buddhist priests, clinging to their own shallow views and interpretations, slandered the sutra and persecuted him.

The third powerful enemy, arrogant false sages, refers to high-ranking Buddhist priests who pass themselves off as sages or saints and use their status and influence to persecute the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

During the Daishonin's time, the priest Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple best fitted this description of an arrogant false sage. While he was highly respected as a saint by the people of Kamakura, he was in reality most concerned with personal profit and advantage and maliciously sought to destroy the votary of the Lotus Sutra. He ingratiated himself with the wives of certain government officials, among whom he spread rumours and false accusations against Nichiren Daishonin and his followers, plotting in this way to influence the authorities to oppress the Daishonin. This led to the Daishonin's persecution at Tatsunokuchi – a failed attempt to execute him – and his subsequent exile to Sado Island.

Because he was sent into exile twice – first to Ito in Izu Peninsula and second to Sado Island – Nichiren Daishonin stated that he had read with his very life the passage in the 'Encouraging Devotion' chapter that reads 'again and again we will be banished'. (LSOC, p. 234)

It is clear, then, that Nichiren Daishonin encountered major persecutions at the hands of the three powerful enemies, exactly as the Lotus Sutra says will befall its votary, or true practitioner. Because he met persecutions on account of propagating the Lotus Sutra that exactly atched those predicted in the sutra itself, the Daishonin, in 'The Selection of the Time', writes, 'There can be no room to doubt that I, Nichiren, am the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in all of Japan.' (WND-1, p. 575) In the same work, he also states, 'I, Nichiren, am the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in the entire land of Jambudvīpa [the entire world].' (WND-1, p. 552)

In light of all this, the Lotus Sutra is the Buddhist scripture that predicts the Daishonin's appearance and behaviour in the Latter Day of the Law, and by reading the Lotus Sutra with his very life (by fulfilling the predictions made in the sutra), the Daishonin proved that the sutra itself was in no way false, attesting to the validity of Shakyamuni's words.

Bodhisattva Superior Practices

Nichiren Daishonin was the first to stand alone and stake his life on spreading the Mystic Law as the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. In this way, he demonstrated that his mission and behaviour accorded with that of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, whom Shakyamuni, in the Lotus Sutra, entrusted with propagating the sutra's teaching in the Latter Day of the Law.

The 'Supernatural Powers' chapter explains that, having been entrusted with propagating the sutra's teaching in the Latter Day of the Law, Superior Practices and the other Bodhisattvas of the Earth will function as the sun and moon to illuminate and expel the obscurity and gloom plaguing people living amid the realities of this world. Also, in the 'Emerging from the Earth'

chapter, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are compared to the lotus flowers that, unsullied by this impure world and untroubled by earthly desires or afflictions, blossom and bring forth the fruit of enlightenment. This indicates that Superior Practices is the enlightened teacher of the Latter Day of the Law who, in Shakyamuni's stead, teaches and leads the people of this age to Buddhahood.

Nichiren Daishonin gave himself the name Nichiren (meaning 'sun lotus'), and as the votary of the Lotus Sutra persevered in his efforts to save people from suffering. His choice of this name expresses his conviction that he is fulfilling the role of Superior Practices, whose function is compared in the 'Supernatural Powers' and 'Emerging from the Earth' chapters to the sun, the moon and the lotus flower.

While in terms of his behaviour, the Daishonin was carrying out the function of Superior Practices, on a deeper level – in terms of his intrinsic, enlightened state of life – he was the Buddha of limitless joy from time without beginning, the Buddha who can fully display the dignity life inherently possesses.

When one believes in the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-enge- kyo and reveals the Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo inherent in one's life, one can manifest the life-state of the Buddha of time without beginning. It means that ordinary people actually carry out the actions of that Buddha in their daily lives and society.

Nichiren Daishonin, as the votary of the Lotus Sutra, overcame numerous great difficulties and persecutions. On 12 September 1271, when he emerged victorious from the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, he shed his transient identity as an ordinary person burdened with karma and suffering and simultaneously opened and revealed his true identity. That true identity was his original state of life as the Buddha of limitless joy from time without beginning. (This transformation is known as 'casting off the transient and revealing the true'.)

The Daishonin then expressed this fundamental life-state of Buddhahood in the form of a mandala, the Gohonzon, which he modelled after the Ceremony in the Air¹¹ in the Lotus Sutra, establishing it as the object of devotion that all people of the Latter Day of the Law should believe in and uphold in order to attain Buddhahood.

SGI members pray to this Gohonzon as an embodiment, or mirror, of their innate Buddhahood, chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with the conviction that they themselves are the Mystic Law, and strive to teach and share this teaching with others. By doing so they will, just like Nichiren Daishonin, manifest the Mystic Law in their lives, revealing the state of Buddhahood and enjoying the benefit and good fortune that comes with it. ●

¹One of the assemblies described in the Lotus Sutra, in which the entire gathering is suspended in space above the ground. During the ceremony, Shakyamuni transfers the essence of the Lotus Sutra specifically to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth led by Superior Practices, entrusting them with its propagation in the Latter Day of the Law. The heart of the ceremony consists of the revelation of Shakyamuni's original enlightenment and the transfer of the essence of the sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Study material part

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth²

President Ikeda: ...Don't the Bodhisattvas of the Earth themselves embody this state of fusion with the Buddha, of oneness with the universe? Though we speak of them as bodhisattvas, they are in fact Buddhas.

Where have the Bodhisattvas of the Earth come from? The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai says that they dwell in 'the ultimate depths of life, that being the absolute reality'. In other words, they represent the truth in the depths of life, the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the wellspring of the universe and the fundamental power of life. It is the ultimate expression of wisdom, and the foundation of all laws and principles. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth embody that fundamental energy. Moreover, they are committed to the bodhisattva ideal.

Bodhisattva is not a stage of completion (the effect of Buddhahood), but of incompleteness (the cause of Buddhahood). Bodhisattvas, while incomplete, cause their lives to overflow with the state of completion (the effect of Buddhahood). To put it another way, while partaking in a state of life of boundless joy and completion (the effect of Buddhahood), a bodhisattva at the same time takes action to advance further ahead, to ascend ever higher, and to lead still more people to enlightenment. In other words, it is a state of 'incomplete completeness'.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are eternal activists who base themselves on the Mystic Law; theirs are lives of eternal advance. Our summoning forth the bounding energy of these bodhisattvas constitutes the 'emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth' within our own being. When we do this, we can break through the shell of the small self that has hitherto constrained our lives.

Saito: Certainly, if we were not practising faith, it would be all we could manage simply to take care of ourselves. In all likelihood, we wouldn't have the latitude to try to help people who are miserable become happy. And probably the thought of trying to change the country or of changing the destiny of humankind would have never even occurred to us.

Endo: But through the SGI, we have learned about the Gohonzon and have been able to lead incomparably greater lives than we might have otherwise. As the saying goes, 'A blue fly, if it to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles.' (WND-1, p. 17) This thought fills me with immense gratitude.

President Ikeda: It comes down to people revolutionising their state of life. From a broad perspective, our efforts to cause countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth to emerge – to help revolutionise their lives – amount to a struggle to change the state of life of society at large. It is a struggle to elevate the state of all humankind. Isn't this the transformation that 'breaking through the earth' symbolises?

Saito: In that sense, the preconception held by those in the assembly of the Lotus Sutra – that Shakyamuni attained enlightenment for the first time during his present lifetime in India – is indicative of their confusion about the origin of their own lives. They don't understand

²

From The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, Volume 3, pp. 214-216 (SGI Newsletter No. 3280)

wellspring of their own existence. This is comparable to the delusion of people in modern society.

President Ikeda: That's right. Failing to comprehend the greatness of their own lives, they become attached to unimportant details. The power of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the fundamental power we have as human beings to break through all differences – whether of ethnicity, race, gender or social standing – and lead people to happiness. We are plain and unadorned ordinary people; we are thoroughly human and infinitely courageous. This is the pride of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is an earth-shaking event attesting to the greatness of the underlying power of life. We have to convey this to people throughout the world. The transformation of the perception of the Buddha in the essential teaching amounts to a fundamental transformation in the perception of human beings. ●

Section B: 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life'

Study material part 3

Nichiren Daishonin's Gosho, 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life'³

I have just carefully read your letter. To reply, the ultimate Law of life and death as transmitted from the Buddha to all living beings is Myoho-enge-kyo. The five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo were transferred from Shakyamuni and Many Treasures, the two Buddhas inside the treasure tower, to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, carrying on a heritage unbroken since the infinite past. Myo represents death, and ho, life. Living beings that pass through the two phases of life and death are the entities of the Ten Worlds, or the entities of Myoho-enge-kyo.

T'ien-t'ai says that one should understand that living beings and their environments, and the causes and effects at work within them, are all the Law of rengo (the lotus).⁴ Here 'living beings and their environments' means the phenomena of life and death. Thus, it is clear that, where life and death exist, cause and effect, or the Law of the lotus, is at work.

The Great Teacher Dengyo states, 'The two phases of life and death are the wonderful workings of one mind. The two ways of existence and nonexistence are the true functions of an inherently enlightened mind.'⁵ No phenomena – either heaven or earth, yin or yang,⁶ the sun or the moon, the five planets,⁷ or any of the worlds from hell to Buddhahood – are free from the two phases of life and death. Life and death are simply the two functions of Myoho-enge-kyo. In his Great Concentration and Insight, T'ien-t'ai says, 'Arising is the arising of the essential nature of the Law, and extinction is the extinction of that nature.' Shakyamuni and Many Treasures, the two Buddhas, are also the two phases of life and death.

Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpas ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another. To chant Myoho-enge-kyo with this realisation is to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death. This is a matter of the utmost importance for Nichiren's disciples and lay supporters, and this is what it means to embrace the Lotus Sutra.

For one who summons up one's faith and chants Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with the profound insight that now is the last moment of one's life, the sutra proclaims: 'When the lives of these persons come to an end, they will be received into the hands of a thousand Buddhas,

³ From The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Volume 1, pp. 216-217

⁴ The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra.

⁵ The Essential Doctrines Transmitted within the Tendai Lotus School.

⁶ Yin and yang are two universal principles of ancient Chinese philosophy. Yin is the negative, dark, and feminine principle; yang is the positive, bright, and masculine principle. Their interaction was thought to determine the destiny of all things.

⁷ Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. In the thirteenth century the more distant planets were as yet unknown, and Earth was not known to be among the planets.

who will free them from all fear and keep them from falling into the evil paths of existence.’⁸ How can we possibly hold back our tears at the inexpressible joy of knowing that not just one or two, not just one hundred or two hundred, but as many as a thousand Buddhas will come to greet us with open arms!

Concerning one who disbelieves the Lotus Sutra, because the sutra states, ‘When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell,’⁹ the wardens of hell will surely come for one and take one away by the hands. How pitiful! The ten kings¹⁰ of the world of the dead will then pass judgement, and the heavenly messengers¹¹ who have been with one since birth will berate one for one’s evil deeds.

Think of those thousand Buddhas extending their hands to all of Nichiren’s disciples and lay supporters who chant Nam- myoho-renge-kyo as melons or moonflowers extending their slender vines. My followers are now able to accept and uphold the Lotus Sutra because of the strong ties they formed with it in their past existences. They are certain to obtain the fruit of Buddhahood in the future. The heritage of the Lotus Sutra flows within the lives of those who never forsake it in any lifetime whatsoever – whether in the past, the present, or the future. But those who disbelieve and slander the Lotus Sutra will immediately ‘destroy all the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world’.¹² Because they cut themselves off from the potential to attain enlightenment, they do not share the heritage of the ultimate Law of life and death.

All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam- myoho-renge-kyo with the spirit of many in body but one in mind, transcending all differences among themselves¹³ to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren’s propagation. When you are so united, even the great desire for widespread propagation can be fulfilled. But if any of Nichiren’s disciples disrupt the unity of many in body but one in mind, they would be like warriors who destroy their own castle from within.

Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood. But instead they have persecuted me in various ways and finally had me banished to this island. You have followed Nichiren, however, and met with suffering as a result. It pains me deeply to think of your anguish. Gold can be neither burned by fire nor corroded or swept away by water, but iron is vulnerable to both. A worthy person is like gold, a fool like iron. You are like pure gold because you embrace the ‘gold’ of the Lotus Sutra. The sutra states, ‘Just as among all the mountains,

⁸ Lotus Sutra, chap. 28.

⁹ Ibid., chap. 3.

¹⁰ Symbolic figures from popular religious tradition. One Chinese concept viewed hell as a demonic court of law where the dead were tried for their evil deeds.

¹¹ Gods said to dwell on one’s shoulders from the time of birth and to record one’s every act. They represent the law of cause and effect at work in one’s life.

¹² Lotus Sutra, chap. 3.

¹³ The phrase ‘transcending all differences among themselves’ could be rendered literally as ‘without any thought of self or other, this or that’. This is not a denial of individuality, but rather urges the bridging of the gaps between people that arise from self-centredness.

Mount Sumeru is foremost, so this Lotus Sutra is likewise.’¹⁴ It also states, ‘The good fortune you gain thereby... cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water.’¹⁵

It must be ties of karma from the distant past that have destined you to become my disciple at a time like this. Shakyamuni and Many Treasures certainly realised this truth. The sutra’s statement, ‘Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers’,¹⁶ cannot be false in any way.

How admirable that you have asked about the transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death! I have never heard of anyone who has asked such a question. I have answered in complete detail in this letter, so please take it deeply to heart. The important point is to carry out your practice confident that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo alone is the heritage that was transferred from Shakyamuni and Many Treasures to Bodhisattva Superior Practices.

The function of fire is to burn and give light. The function of water is to wash away filth. The winds blow away dust and breathe life into plants, animals, and human beings. The earth produces the grasses and trees, and heaven provides nourishing moisture. The five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo are also like that. They are the cluster of blessings brought by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, disciples of the Buddha in his true identity. The Lotus Sutra says that Bodhisattva Superior Practices will appear now, in the Latter Day of the Law, to propagate this teaching, but has this happened? Whether or not Bodhisattva Superior Practices has appeared in this world, Nichiren has already made a start in propagating this teaching.

Be resolved to summon forth the great power of faith, and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with the prayer that your faith will be steadfast and correct at the moment of death. Never seek any other way to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death, and manifest it in your life. Only then will you realise that earthly desires are enlightenment, and that the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana. Even embracing the Lotus Sutra would be useless without the heritage of faith.

I will go into particulars again on another occasion.

With my deep respect, Nichiren, the shramana of Japan

The eleventh day of the second month in the ninth year of Bun’ei (1272), cyclical sign mizunoe-saru

Reply to the Honourable Sairen-bo ●

¹⁴ Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., chap. 7.

Background

This letter, dated the eleventh day of the second month in 1272, was sent by Nichiren Daishonin to Sairen-bo Nichijo, a former Tendai priest who, for reasons that are unclear, was also living in exile on Sado Island. Details about Sairen-bo are scarce, but it is known that he was originally from Kyoto, and that he had studied at Mount Hiei, the seat of the Tendai school, before his exile. He was also present at the Tsukahara Debate, held in front of Sammai-do, the Daishonin's dwelling at Tsukahara, on the sixteenth and seventeenth days of the first month in 1272. In this debate the Daishonin was the clear victor over Pure Land, True Word, and other priests from Sado and from various provinces of northern Japan. A number of people converted to his teachings at this time, among them Sairen-bo.

Sairen-bo was a highly educated priest to whom the Daishonin sent several important essays, including 'The True Aspect of All Phenomena' and 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life'. He had a number of unresolved questions about Buddhist theory, and he addressed them one by one to the Daishonin, who in turn answered these questions in written form. The Daishonin praised him, saying, 'How admirable that you have asked about the transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death!' In his reply the Daishonin offers a look into the wonder of the Buddha's own enlightenment, as well as the practical means whereby ordinary people may attain the same end.

In the first paragraph, the Daishonin states that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the heritage of the ultimate Law of life, and that the transmission of this Law is made from the Buddha to all living beings. Then he refers to the question of how we can inherit the ultimate Law of life and manifest it within ourselves.

This Law flows in the depths of the lives of those who believe in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, practise in exact accord with them, and chant the daimoku. The Daishonin declares that there is no distinction whatsoever between Shakyamuni Buddha, the Lotus Sutra, and us ordinary people.

Viewed from the standpoint of the Daishonin's Buddhism, this can be taken as a declaration that there is absolutely no difference or separation between Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha of the Latter Day, the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo – or the Gohonzon which embodies that Law – and ourselves, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

In terms of time, the heritage – the mystic relationship between the Law and the lives of the people – courses eternally through past, present and future, unbroken in any lifetime. In terms of space, the Daishonin proclaims that the heritage of the ultimate Law flows within the lives of his disciples and lay supporters who work in perfect unity for the realisation of a peaceful world and happiness for all humanity.

Having stated that the ultimate Law is within the lives of human beings, Nichiren Daishonin further explains how to inherit the Law. He emphasises the importance of the attitude, 'now is the last moment...', in order to manifest innate Buddhahood, a state that transcends both life and death.

In discussing the thousand Buddhas and the ten kings of hell, he reveals the continuity

of cause and effect spanning past, present and future. Whatever state of life predominates while one is alive will continue in the next life. Whether one can succeed to the heritage of the Law depends entirely on one's faith.

This is why he strictly warns in his conclusion, 'Even embracing the Lotus Sutra would be useless without the heritage of faith.'

Study material part 4

SGI President Ikeda's lectures on 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life'¹⁷

Up to this point, the Daishonin has described the characteristics of faith infused with the heritage of the ultimate Law of life and death. To summarise, such faith is marked by (1) confidence that one will attain Buddhahood in this lifetime, (2) the profound insight that now is the last moment of one's life, and (3) continuing to practise Buddhism as long as one lives. The heritage of attaining Buddhahood is found in such firm, resolute faith.

Teaching others about faith in the Mystic Law and actualising a more peaceful world is the object of our movement for kosen-rufu. Of vital importance to this endeavour are the harmonious community of practitioners and the mentor-disciple spirit.

The harmonious community of practitioners and the mentor-disciple spirit

All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo with the spirit of many in body but one in mind, transcending all differences among themselves¹⁸ to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation. When you are so united, even the great desire for widespread propagation [kosen-rufu] can be fulfilled. But if any of Nichiren's disciples disrupt the unity of many in body but one in mind, they would be like warriors who destroy their own castle from within. (WND-1, p. 217)

The correct flow of the heritage of the ultimate Law of life and death is contingent on the struggle of mentor and disciple to realise kosen-rufu. Kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law is a battle between the Buddha and devilish functions. Without a harmonious community of practitioners that is solidly united in purpose and brimming with the spirit of mentor and disciple, we cannot hope to triumph in that endeavour.

In the passage we are studying in this instalment, the Daishonin voices his expectations for all of his disciples, both priest and lay, describing his ideal vision of the mentor-disciple relationship and the harmonious community of practitioners who strive with him to realise kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law. In doing so, he urges his followers to transcend all differences among themselves, to become as inseparable as fish and water, and to unite in the spirit of 'many in body but one in mind'. The heritage of the ultimate Law of life and death, he says, flows in the lives of those who chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo – a practice for both oneself and others – based on this spirit of equality and unity.

'Transcending all differences among themselves'

Let us first look at the term 'differences' in the phrase 'transcending all differences among

¹⁷ From SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's lectures on 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life' (SGI Newsletter No. 7198 and extracts from SGI Newsletter No. 7237)

¹⁸ The phrase 'transcending all differences among themselves' could be rendered literally as 'without any thought of self or other, this or that'. This is not a denial of individuality, but rather urges the bridging of the divisions among people that arise from self-centredness.

themselves'. What the Daishonin specifically means here are feelings of antagonism, discrimination, and selfishness that arise from the tendency to see self and others, or diverse phenomena or events, as separate and disconnected – a tendency that obstructs empathy and understanding. The heritage of the Buddha will not exist in such a negative, ego-driven mind-set.

It is all too easy for the human heart to succumb to egoism and self-interest when one is tempted by power, prestige, or personal profit, strongly attached to status and position, or obsessed with fame and fortune. Faith is ultimately a struggle with our own self-centredness. No matter how high a person's leadership position or what fine-sounding things they may say, if they have lost their faith and are motivated by self-serving ends, they will find it impossible to remain in the pure and harmonious community of practitioners who share the great vow or desire for kosen-rufu.

Indeed, in this writing, the Daishonin refers to those practitioners who disrupt the unity of 'many in body but one in mind' as being 'like warriors who destroy their own castle from within'. (WND-1, p. 217) In other words, they are like 'worms within the lion's body', destroying the kosen-rufu movement from the inside. Hence, the Daishonin instructs his followers on the importance of 'transcending all differences among themselves'.

'Become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim'

In addition, the Daishonin says that his followers should 'become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim' (WND-1, p. 217) This indicates a spirit of harmony and unity. It also implies a spirit of mutual respect, understanding, support and caring regardless of superficial differences in circumstances or position. Simply put, it means getting along together. When we work together for the same great objective of kosen-rufu based on the spirit of mentor and disciple, inspiring, encouraging and supporting one another, we will naturally come into rapport and strive to maintain positive, respectful relations. In dynamic and growing organisations, one often finds that there are good working relationships and rapport among the leaders.

The emperor Liu Pei and his loyal prime minister Chuko K'ung-ming, two of the main protagonists of the Chinese classic *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, shared a relationship of profound mutual respect and admiration, described as being 'like fish and water'.

When we embrace the great vow of the Buddha as our own, chanting daimoku and undertaking the Buddha's work for the happiness of humanity and the realisation of kosen-rufu, we can come to appreciate that all our fellow members are people worthy of the greatest respect who, like us, are leading lives of supreme mission. This forms the basis of a vibrant relationship of camaraderie and inspiration that is above antagonism or discrimination.

The spirit of 'many in body but one in mind' and the heritage of faith

Further, the Daishonin stresses the importance of uniting in the spirit of 'many in body but one in mind'. This is the very foundation of the harmonious community of practitioners. Needless to say, it also encompasses the two preceding points I have just made. 'Many in body' – which can also be translated as 'different in body' – means that we each have our own unique personalities, talents, roles to play, and so on. In a general sense, 'one in mind' – or, 'one in heart' – means sharing a common goal or common values. More specifically for us, it means sharing faith in the Mystic Law and the great vow for kosen-rufu.

The spirit of 'many in body but one in mind' in Buddhism refers to the individual and

the group harmonising based on the Law. It indicates a richly diverse and dynamic community of capable people who inspire one another in their efforts to advance kosen-rufu. The Daishonin concludes that the heritage of the ultimate Law of life and death flows in the lives of those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this spirit.

In this writing and elsewhere, he emphasises first of all that unity is the key to achieving success and victory in all endeavours,¹⁹ and secondly that unity is indispensable in the struggle for kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law – a struggle between the Buddha and devilish functions. He also expresses his firm conviction that as long as he and his followers are united in their commitment for kosen-rufu, they will be able to triumph over even the most formidable obstacles.²⁰

Chanting with a shared commitment

The spirit of ‘many in body but one in mind’, in a sense, represents the ultimate manifestation of the ‘strategy of the Lotus Sutra’,²¹⁴ which is chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon – specifically, chanting with a shared commitment for kosen-rufu. No plans or strategies for kosen-rufu will succeed without such united prayer. Strong prayer based on unity will also give rise to tremendous momentum. So even should there appear individuals who seek to disrupt the unity of our movement, their negative influence will be rebuffed by everyone’s focused spirit.

‘One in mind’, or shared commitment, also refers to the great vow for kosen-rufu – the great vow of the Buddha who seeks to lead all people to enlightenment and also the great vow of the mentor. ‘One in mind’ means making this great vow our own and working towards its actualisation. The essence of this shared commitment can be found in prayer inspired by the wish for kosen-rufu, and this prayer pulses vitally in the Soka Gakkai.

A rhythm of perfect victory

When we advance in the united spirit of ‘many in body but one in mind’ based on chanting daimoku for the realisation of kosen-rufu, we generate a powerful forward impetus and the energy to secure victory.

Everyone who shares in this spirit will be able to work together harmoniously and feel joy even in the midst of difficult struggles. Unity of purpose holds the key to creating such a rhythm of victory, a rhythm of dynamic activity.

In other words, the ‘rhythm of the Mystic Law’ emerges when all unite their hearts with the heart of the Buddha, with the great vow for kosen-rufu. Because everyone’s life resonates with the Buddha’s lofty spirit, it leads to growth, development, joy, and victory. It also gives

¹⁹ The Daishonin writes, ‘If the spirit of many in body but one in mind prevails among the people, they will achieve all their goals, whereas if one in body but different in mind, they can achieve nothing remarkable. The more than three thousand volumes of Confucian and Taoist literature are filled with examples. Even an individual at cross purposes with himself is certain to end in failure. Yet a hundred or even a thousand people can definitely attain their goal, if they are of one mind.’ (WND-1, p. 618)

²⁰ The Daishonin writes, ‘Although Nichiren and his followers are few, because they are different in body, but united in mind, they will definitely accomplish their great mission of widely propagating the Lotus Sutra. Though evils may be numerous, they cannot prevail over a single great truth, just as many raging fires are quenched by a single shower of rain. This principle also holds true with Nichiren and his followers.’ (WND-1, p. 618)

²¹ The strategy of the Lotus Sutra means battling hardships and difficulties based on chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon. In ‘The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra’, the Daishonin says, ‘Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other.’ (WND-1, p. 1001)

rise to an indestructible bastion of creative talent, happiness, and peace, where people are linked together by deep bonds far surpassing ordinary ties of friendship.

To unite in the spirit of ‘many in body but one in mind’ means for each of us to align our heart with the great vow of the Buddha and the spirit of the mentor. In that respect, the oneness of mentor and disciple is the essence of this united spirit in faith.

In this writing, the Daishonin goes on to clarify the crucial point that the ‘true goal’ of his propagation lies in ensuring that his followers embody the spirit of ‘many in body but one in mind’. For only a community of practitioners united in this way can succeed to the Buddha’s heritage and develop an enduring movement, based on the oneness of mentor and disciple, to ensure that this heritage continues to be widely transmitted into the future.

The Daishonin realised that after his passing, the existence of a solidly united gathering of followers in which his spirit lived on would mean that people of future generations who had never personally met him could still embrace faith and practise as his disciples with the same commitment for kosen-rufu, thus permitting the heritage of faith for attaining Buddhahood to flow on indefinitely. The Daishonin, therefore, writes that when his followers are united in the spirit of ‘many in body but one in mind’, ‘even the great desire for widespread propagation [kosen-rufu] can be fulfilled’. (WND-1, p. 217) It is a declaration that, as long as there is a unified gathering of practitioners who uphold the Mystic Law, the Buddha’s great desire or vow for kosen-rufu will be passed on without interruption and kosen-rufu will certainly be achieved. Unity is the most crucial ingredient in fulfilling this great aspiration.

In the Soka Gakkai, the struggles of first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and second president Josei Toda were dedicated to building a strong united organisation pulsing with the rhythm of perfect victory. I, too, have devoted my life to carrying on and completing this mission, and today we have realised a solidly united, harmonious community of practitioners, serving as the foundation for worldwide kosen-rufu.

My dearest wish now is that the youth who are our successors will fully inherit this noble rhythm of victory driven by the unity of ‘many in body but one in mind’.

The meaning of ‘one in mind’

Towards that end, I would like to confirm the meaning of a number of points regarding the concept of ‘one in mind’, or unity of purpose, which is the key to victory.

1. The Great Vow for Kosen-rufu

First of all, ‘one in mind’, or unity of purpose, refers to the great desire or vow for kosen-rufu.

In the midst of the Atsuhara Persecution,²² the Daishonin wrote to his youthful disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu,²³ ‘My wish is that all my disciples make a great vow.’ (WND-1, p. 1003) This is none other than a passionate call to his followers to dedicate their lives to the cause of kosen-rufu.

The great vow to realise kosen-rufu is also the very heart of the mentor-disciple spirit

²²Atsuhara Persecution: A series of threats and acts of violence against the Daishonin’s followers in Atsuhara Village, in Fuji District of Suruga Province (part of present-day Shizuoka Prefecture), over a period of three years, beginning in earnest in 1278. The persecution culminated with Hei no Saemon, the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, ordering the execution of three of the Daishonin’s followers – the brothers Jinshiro, Yagoro, and Yarokuro – who steadfastly refused to recant their faith.

²³Nanjo Tokimitsu (1259-1332): A staunch follower of the Daishonin and the steward of Ueno Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province (part of present-day Shizuoka Prefecture). During the Atsuhara Persecution, Tokimitsu used his influence to protect his fellow believers, sheltering some in his home. The Daishonin honoured him for his courage and tireless efforts by calling him ‘Ueno the Worthy’, though he was only about 20 at the time.

shared by Mr Makiguchi, Mr Toda, and myself, who have inherited this vow through directly connecting our lives to the Daishonin. All three of us have given ourselves to its actualisation with tireless dedication and ungrudging effort. This is truly the essence of the spirit of ‘many in body but one in mind’.

‘One in mind’ also means the spirit to steadfastly battle destructive forces that seek to obstruct and harm this noble movement. Over the years, there have occasionally been individuals in our organisation who forgot all about faith, forsook our shared commitment to kosen-rufu, and succumbed to the desire for fame and fortune. Motivated by self-interest, these individuals tried to disrupt the harmonious community of practitioners, which is a grave offence in Buddhism. It is important that we take a fearless stand against such destructive actions. This is the essence of the Lotus Sutra, and it is also the Gakkai spirit.

2. Respecting our fellow practitioners

Next is the point that this oneness of mind, or unity of purpose, must be built on genuine respect for our fellow practitioners.

The spirit of kosen-rufu taught in the Lotus Sutra rests on the profound belief that all people possess the Buddha nature and thus the potential to attain Buddhahood. A community of practitioners harmoniously united for the sake of kosen-rufu will naturally reflect this philosophy of the Lotus Sutra in its own spirit and actions.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging²⁴ undertook the practice of bowing in reverence to all those he encountered, based on his belief that everyone has the Buddha nature and can attain enlightenment through faith in the Lotus Sutra. He also bowed in respect to those who did not uphold the sutra.

It goes without saying that our fellow members who embrace the Gohonzon and strive for kosen-rufu will all definitely attain Buddhahood, and we should therefore accord them the utmost respect. As the ‘Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy’ (28th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra says regarding those who embrace its teachings, ‘You should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha.’ (LSOC28, p. 365)

The unity of ‘many in body but one in mind’ symbolises a bond that is based on the Buddhist philosophy of respect for all people. ‘One in mind’ therefore implies a spirit of mutual respect among fellow practitioners.

3. Faith grounded in the shared commitment of mentor and disciple

Third, ‘one in mind’ simply means faith grounded in the shared commitment of mentor and disciple. The essence of the spirit of ‘many in body but one in mind’ is found in this faith, which means attuning our hearts with the great vow for kosen-rufu, which is the heart of the Buddha and the heart of all true leaders of kosen-rufu.

Nikko Shonin,²⁵ the Daishonin’s disciple and direct successor, remained true to his

²⁴ Bodhisattva Never Disparaging: A bodhisattva described in the ‘Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’ (20th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. This bodhisattva – Shakyamuni in a previous lifetime – 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 are all practising the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood.’ (LSOC20, p. 308) However, he was attacked by arrogant people, who beat him with sticks and staves and threw stones at him. The sutra explains that his practice of bowing to others’ Buddha nature became the cause for him to attain Buddhahood.

²⁵ Nikko Shonin (1246-1333): Nichiren Daishonin’s disciple and the only one of the six senior priests who remained true to the Daishonin’s spirit. He became the Daishonin’s disciple at a young age, serving him devotedly and even accompanying him into exile on Sado Island. When the Daishonin retired to Mount Minobu, Nikko devoted his

mentor's spirit throughout his life and built a harmonious community of practitioners directly connected to the Daishonin. In contrast, the five senior priests,²⁶ fearing persecution by the authorities and forgetting the spirit of mentor and disciple, strayed from the correct path of kosen-rufu.

Turning against one's mentor is the epitome of disrupting the unity of 'many in body but one in mind'.

'Soka Gakkai Buddha' As long as the fundamental spirit of striving for kosen-rufu demonstrated by the first three

presidents pulses vitally in our organisation and everyone is united in the spirit of 'many in body but one in mind', the Soka Gakkai will forever possess the great life-force of the Buddha who seeks to lead all people to enlightenment.

This vibrant force shines with the great light of compassion that breaks through the darkness of people's suffering and imparts courage and hope. It resounds with the lion's roar that vanquishes injustice and steadfastly champions truth. And it inspires immense confidence in each person that they can transform their karma and realise happiness both for themselves and others.

Endowed with this power of the Buddha, the Soka Gakkai towers as a community of practitioners solidly united in purpose, a great and indestructible bastion of the shared commitment of mentor and disciple that will surmount even the fiercest onslaughts of three obstacles and four devils. Therefore, President Toda predicted that in the sutras of the future, the Soka Gakkai's name would be recorded as 'Soka Gakkai Buddha'. The unified gathering of the Soka Gakkai, directly connected to the Daishonin and working to make kosen-rufu a reality, is itself a Buddha. This was my mentor's unshakeable conviction.

President Toda often remarked, 'The Soka Gakkai organisation is more precious than my own life.' I have sought to protect and nurture this harmonious community of practitioners, which is carrying out the Buddha's will and decree, as if it were President Toda's life itself. Making the unity of 'many in body, one in mind' the organisation's guiding credo, I have done my very best to develop the Soka Gakkai and advance kosen-rufu.

Let us continue exerting ourselves wholeheartedly in faith and taking sincere action to create unity in diversity – 'many in body but one in mind' – and thereby further expand our harmonious community of practitioners, built by the first three presidents through the shared commitment of mentor and disciple. For this itself is the path of kosen-rufu and is a sure step towards world peace.... (SGI Newsletter No. 7198)

The eternal karmic ties of mentor and disciple

...The Daishonin also tells Sairen-bo of the profound karmic ties they share as mentor and disciple. This is the passage where he says, 'It must be ties of karma from the distant past that have destined you to become my disciple at a time like this.' (WND-1, p. 217) The Daishonin

energies to propagating activities in Suruga Province (part of present-day Shizuoka Prefecture) and surrounding areas. After the Daishonin's passing, the other senior priests gradually began to distance themselves from their mentor's teachings. As a result, Nikko determined to part ways with them. He settled in Suruga's Fuji District, where he dedicated the rest of his life to protecting and propagating the Daishonin's teaching and to raising disciples.

²⁶ Five senior priests: Five of the six senior priests, excluding Nikko, designated by Nichiren shortly before his death as his principal disciples. These five later betrayed their mentor's teaching.

indicates that this mysterious bond can perhaps only be fathomed by the Buddhas Shakyamuni and Many Treasures.

Further, he explains that the profound karmic ties shared by mentor and disciple who uphold the Lotus Sutra are an indisputable truth, citing a passage from 'The Parable of the Phantom City' (7th) chapter, 'Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers.' (LSOC7, p. 178) This passage reveals the depth of the mentor-disciple bond.

To give a brief explanation of its meaning: Since the distant time of major world system dust particle kalpas in the past, Shakyamuni's voice-hearer disciples had constantly been born in various Buddha lands with Shakyamuni as their mentor and carried out bodhisattva practice together.

The important point here is that Shakyamuni's voice-hearer disciples in the Lotus Sutra were actually bodhisattvas who had undertaken bodhisattva practice in past lifetimes. Through these words of the Buddha, the voice-hearers remember that they originally possessed the life-state of bodhisattvas. The Lotus Sutra reveals that since the immeasurable past the voice-hearers have possessed 'the wish that they have had deep in their hearts from the start' (cf. LSOC8, p. 182) – that is, the wish to attain supreme enlightenment and free all living beings from suffering. It can therefore be said that the voice-hearers, by recalling their great wish from the distant past, discover and awaken to their identity as living beings who have carried out the same bodhisattva practice as their teacher Shakyamuni.

This passage indeed describes the eternal relationship of mentor and disciple who strive together to realise the most profound aspiration of human beings and of all life – namely, the enlightenment and happiness of both self and others. A true mentor in Buddhism is one who enables us to remember this aspiration. A true disciple, meanwhile, is one who follows the mentor's teaching, who recalls that this most profound aspiration is in fact their own, and who, convinced from the bottom of their heart that this is indeed so, launches into action in accord with the mentor's instructions.

The most profound mentor-disciple relationship is that of mentor and disciple who struggle together for kosen-rufu. Their lives are linked on the deepest level. The eternal world of Buddhahood exists in the depths of their lives. In other words, both mentor and disciple dwell in the immense life-state of the 'palace of the ninth consciousness,²⁷ the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life's functions'. (WND-1, p. 832)

'Those persons who had heard the law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers'

At the third memorial (second anniversary) for his mentor Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (in November 1946), second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda spoke these words:

In your vast and boundless compassion, you let me accompany you even to prison. As a result, I could read with my entire being the passage from the Lotus Sutra, 'Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers.' (LSOC7, p. 178) The benefit of this was coming to know my former existence as a Bodhisattva of the Earth and to absorb with my very life even a small

²⁷ The ninth, or amala-, consciousness is the Buddha nature, or the fundamental purifying force, that is free from all karmic impediments.

degree of the sutra's meaning. Could there be any greater happiness than this?²⁸

This captures the essence of the mentor-disciple relationship in Buddhism.

In those early days of our organisation, there were many other Gakkai leaders who proclaimed to be disciples of President Makiguchi. But once the wartime persecution that assailed the Soka Gakkai affected them personally and led to their imprisonment, they did a complete turnaround and recanted their faith. Showing gross ingratitude, there were even some who openly turned against President Makiguchi, cursing at the mentor to whom they were so deeply indebted. The human heart can be frightening.

Only Mr Toda, President Makiguchi's true disciple, remained unwavering in his awareness of the profound and noble bond of mentor and disciple, speaking with gratitude of President Makiguchi's 'vast and boundless compassion'. This lofty mentor-disciple relationship is the vital spirit of the Soka Gakkai. If this spirit lives on, our movement will continue to develop eternally. The mentor-disciple spirit of the first three presidents indeed is key to securing the foundations of the kosen-rufu movement for the future.

Mr Toda states that by going to prison with his mentor, he was able to realise his former existence as a Bodhisattva of the Earth and the sutra's meaning. He found the key to this realisation in the sutra passage concerning being reborn in lifetime after lifetime with one's mentor. Both mentor and disciple dedicate their lives eternally to bodhisattva practice – this point is crucial to understanding the essence of the Lotus Sutra. Once in a lecture open to all members, President Toda explained this as follows:

When I said, 'I'm going to go and be reborn in the country of Japan when it's in a state of ruin. Why don't you all come with me?' you all replied, 'Okay, let's go!' 'Yes, why not!' And as a result, we all appeared in this world....

The sutra says that wherever they may be, practitioners of the sutra are sure to be born together with their mentor in various Buddha lands. This is certainly not a lie. It means that mentor and disciple are always born together. In light of these words of the Daishonin, I feel tremendous gratitude to all of you. We were born together in this world as a result of a promise we made in the past.²⁹

In another writing, the Daishonin says, 'I wonder if you and I have not been pledged to each other as teacher and disciple from countless kalpas in the past.' (WND-1, p. 309) Mentor and disciple share eternal karmic ties – ties that extend over past, present, and future. When we strive with all our might for kosen-rufu, we can definitely sense this profound connection. It is the first three presidents of the Soka Gakkai who have revived in the present age an active and engaged mentor-disciple spirit – which is the essence of Nichiren Buddhism. It would certainly be no exaggeration to say that were it not for the appearance of the Soka Gakkai, the spirit of mentor and disciple of the Lotus Sutra and of Nichiren Buddhism would have all but disappeared.

²⁸ Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 386.

²⁹ Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1982), vol. 7, p. 472.

The mentor-disciple relationship is the essence of the Lotus Sutra

So why is the mentor-disciple relationship valued so highly in Buddhism? I would like to reconfirm the Buddhist significance of this relationship.

In general terms, a mentor is someone who teaches one enhanced skills or technical expertise, deeper knowledge, a loftier way of life, a more fulfilling state of mind, and so forth. People look up to someone as a mentor when that person helps them in some way to improve or develop themselves.

In the Buddhist teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the teacher Shakyamuni Buddha, based on his awakening to the Law, strove together with his disciples to enable them to achieve their highest and loftiest potential as human beings. This Law was none other than the Mystic Law, which the Buddha's disciples could not perceive on their own because their awareness was clouded by fundamental darkness and they had no conception of it. Therefore, even if they were given theoretical explanations of the Law or told to practise to overcome sufferings, the life-state of Buddhahood could not be conveyed to them through such words alone. Rather, it was through being inspired by coming into contact with the Buddha's character, along with these words of instruction, that they were able to awaken to the Law within their own lives. This is how the Law was communicated to them.

And this is why the mentor-disciple relationship holds so much importance in Buddhism. The Law is conveyed through the life-to-life bonds of the mentor-disciple relationship; and based on this Law, it is possible for us to achieve our human revolution.

This point also perhaps explains the reason why the Daishonin should refer to the deep mentor-disciple bond between himself and Sairen-bo in this writing on the transmission of the heritage of the ultimate Law of life and death.

It follows, then, that Buddhism does not set forth the mentor as a mystical or transcendent superhuman being. The Daishonin states, 'Outside of the attainment of Buddhahood, there is no "secret" and no "transcendental power".' (cf. OTT, p. 125) As this passage suggests, the supreme and only mystery in Buddhism is the ability of human beings to attain Buddhahood in their present form. Moreover, 'the secret and transcendental power' for attaining Buddhahood is something that can be manifested in the lives of all people.

What, then, were the disciples to do after their teacher Shakyamuni Buddha had passed away? Did it mean that, without the Buddha there to personally teach the Law through his own example, Buddhism could not be transmitted in a true sense? The Lotus Sutra directly addresses these questions.

The sutra teaches that the core of Shakyamuni's very being is none other than the 'vow of the Buddha'. Shakyamuni explains this vow as follows, 'At the start I took a vow, hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us.' (LSOC2, p. 70) That is, the vow to enable all people to attain the same state of enlightenment as he had.

In the theoretical teaching (the first 14 chapters) of the Lotus Sutra, the voice-hearers awaken to the fact that they, too, have originally dedicated their lives to the same great vow as the Buddha. This clarifies that Shakyamuni and his voice-hearer disciples are committed to the same fundamental wish.

The essential teaching (the last 14 chapters) of the sutra reveals the true identity of Shakyamuni as the Buddha who has continued to preach the Law and teach and convert living beings in the saha world based on this vow, ever since attaining enlightenment in the inconceivably distant past. This is the 'Buddha of actual attainment in the remote past' expounded in the 'Life Span' (16th) chapter. In addition, the essential teaching clarifies that the bodhisattvas who share the mentor's commitment – those who after the Buddha's passing

pledge to carry on the Buddha's vow and devote themselves to the Buddha's work of leading all living beings to happiness – are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The Lotus Sutra from beginning to end teaches the oneness, or shared commitment, of mentor and disciple. Looking over the history of Buddhism, the deification of Shakyamuni began when his disciples lost sight of striving with the same commitment he had.

If Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment in the remote past is turned into a transcendent, superhuman being, then the mentor-disciple relationship cannot function. The point is that when the Buddha's disciples fail to emulate his spirit and conduct, the Buddha merely becomes an object of veneration or worship, and therefore cannot serve as a model for others' human revolution.

The Lotus Sutra reveals that a vow lies at the core of Shakyamuni Buddha's character, and it further clarifies that the Law is transmitted to disciples who make that vow their own and strive in the same spirit. This paves the way for conveying the life-state of the Buddha to living beings even in the age after his passing. Especially important in achieving the great vow for kosen-rufu is the willingness to take action without begrudging one's life. The 'Life Span' chapter of the Lotus Sutra says that even after his passing, Shakyamuni will appear where there are practitioners striving in faith with the spirit of 'single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives'. (LSOC16, p. 271)

In this way, even after Shakyamuni's death, the life-state of the Buddha can be conveyed to those who take action based on the great vow for kosen-rufu and a spirit of selfless dedication, which constitute the core of the Buddha's life.

Nichiren Daishonin set forth Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the means for manifesting our innate Buddhahood, and revealed that the great vow for kosen-rufu and selfless dedication are the key to Buddhist practice in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law. By doing so, he secured the transmission of the heritage for attaining Buddhahood.

Everything rests on the fundamental power inherent in the mentor-disciple relationship. The Daishonin's true disciple and direct successor Nikko Shonin says, 'In the teaching of the Daishonin, one attains Buddhahood by correctly following the path of mentor and disciple. If one veers from the path of mentor and disciple, then even if one upholds the Lotus Sutra, one will fall into the hell of incessant suffering.'³⁰

In the present age, it is the first three Soka Gakkai presidents who awakened to the great vow for kosen-rufu, the vow of the Buddha, and have striven with the spirit of not begrudging their lives.

As the disciple of Mr Makiguchi and Mr Toda, I have won in successive momentous struggles against the three powerful enemies.³¹ I have created a history of absolute victory as a disciple. I can proudly report to Mr Toda that I have won on all fronts. I have no regrets whatsoever.

Mr Makiguchi and Mr Toda. Mr Toda and me. Through the actions of its first three presidents, the Soka Gakkai has forged the path of shared commitment of mentor and disciple, which is the essence of Buddhism. Because the mentors and disciples of Soka have been victorious, we have been able to make worldwide kosen-rufu – the decree of the Lotus Sutra and the wish of the Daishonin – a reality.

³⁰

Translated from Japanese. Fuji Nikko Shonin Shoden (Detailed Biography of Nikko Shonin) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1974), vol. 2, p. 261.

³¹Three powerful enemies: The verse section of the 'Encouraging Devotion' (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes the people who will persecute a person who spreads the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after Shakyamuni's passing. In his Annotations on 'The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra', the Great Teacher Miao-lo of China describes these people as belonging to three categories: arrogant lay people, arrogant monks and nuns, and arrogant false sages. (cf. LSOC13, pp. 232-34)

‘If teacher and disciple are of different minds,’ writes the Daishonin, ‘they will never accomplish anything.’ (WND-1, 909) But when mentor and disciple are united, they can achieve even the most lofty goals. The mentor- disciple bond is an unparalleled force for victory. ●

(Extracts from SGI Newsletter No. 7237)

Section C: 'The Three Kinds of Treasure'

Study material part 5

SGI President Ikeda's lecture on 'The Three Kinds of Treasure'³²

The ultimate key to victory in life is accumulating the treasures of the heart

Over and over I recall the moment, unforgettable even now, when I was about to be beheaded and you accompanied me, holding the reins of my horse and weeping tears of grief. Nor could I ever forget it in any lifetime to come. If you should fall into hell for some grave offence, no matter how Shakyamuni Buddha might urge me to become a Buddha, I would refuse; I would rather go to hell with you. For if you and I should fall into hell together, we would find Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra there. But if you depart from my advice even slightly, do not blame me for what may happen. Do not go around lamenting to others how hard it is for you to live in this world. To do so is an act utterly unbecoming to a worthy man. (WND-1, p. 850)

It is rare to be born a human being. The number of those endowed with human life is as small as the amount of earth one can place on a fingernail. Life as a human being is hard to sustain – as hard as it is for the dew to remain on the grass. But it is better to live a single day with honour than to live to 120 and die in disgrace. Live so that all the people of Kamakura will say in your praise that Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo [Shijo Kingo] is diligent in the service of his lord, in the service of Buddhism, and in his concern for other people. More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart! (WND-1, p. 851)

The worthy man Confucius held to his belief 'Nine thoughts to one word', which means that he reconsidered nine times before he spoke. Tan, the Duke of Chou, was so earnest in receiving callers that he would wring out his hair three times in the course of washing it, or spit out his food three times in the course of a meal [in order not to keep them waiting]. Consider this carefully so that you will have no cause to reproach me later. What is called Buddhism is found in this behaviour. 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 behaviour as a human being.
Respectfully.
The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals. (WND-1, 851-52)

³² From SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's lecture on 'The Three Kinds of Treasure' (SGI Newsletter No. 7929)

‘The treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all,’ Nichiren Daishonin says. ‘Strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart!’ (WND-1, p. 851)

This is the message he imparted to his embattled disciple Shijo Kinjo. It contains the most vital key for winning in life.

Our heart is our unsurpassed treasure in life. It is endowed with incredible potential and supreme nobility. Its depth and breadth can be expanded infinitely, and its strength can be developed without bound. The French author Victor Hugo (1802-85) wrote, ‘There is a spectacle greater than the sea, and that is the sky; there is a spectacle greater than the sky, and that is the human soul.’³³

How can we expand the inner realm of our life, develop inner strength, and accumulate the treasures of the heart so that we can lead better lives? The answer is found in practising the Mystic Law.

In the latter part of this writing, ‘The Three Kinds of Treasure’, the Daishonin teaches that ‘the treasures of the heart are the most important of all’. (WND-1, p. 851) The ultimate treasure in terms of achieving genuine victory in life is our Buddha nature manifesting from within through faith in the Mystic Law. This is a crucial teaching of which we must never lose sight.

Two months before this letter was written, Shijo Kingo faced the grave crisis of having his estate confiscated by his lord Ema. Shijo Kingo chose the course of upholding his faith in the Lotus Sutra, even if it meant losing his estate. The Daishonin praised him for this stance, and offered this caution, ‘However wretched a beggar you might become, never disgrace the Lotus Sutra.’ (WND-1, p. 824)³⁴

In fact, these words teach Shijo Kingo the essential criteria he should follow as a practitioner – namely, that faith (a treasure of the heart) is far more important than his estate (a treasure of the storehouse) or his position as a samurai (a treasure of the body). And, indeed, when Shijo Kingo practised in accord with this guidance – putting faith first – his adverse situation began to brighten. Being called on to treat his lord’s illness, he was able to regain the latter’s favour. At the same time, those who had harassed and attacked Shijo Kingo began to experience negative consequences in accord with the strict law of cause and effect. With the Three Kinds of Treasure, the Daishonin praises his disciple’s faith, explaining that Shijo Kingo was able to take the first step towards victory based on the principle of ‘manifesting the Buddha nature from within and bringing forth protection from without’. (cf. WND-1, p. 848) The moment Shijo Kingo stood up with unwavering faith, his inner Buddha nature manifested; this activated the heavenly deities – the benevolent functions of the universe – and resulted in external protection in the form of Lord Ema’s renewed reliance on Shijo Kingo.

But Shijo Kingo still found himself in a rather hostile environment. In this writing, the Daishonin offers a variety of detailed instructions and advice to help Shijo Kingo solidify the victories he has achieved thus far. He urges his disciple to remain vigilant against attack, to interact with others in a courteous and sincere manner, and to foster good relations with his brothers and fellow practitioners and make them his allies. The Daishonin also warns Shijo Kingo to keep a tight rein on his short temper, sternly pointing out that if he succumbs to an outburst, it could cause a serious rift in his relations with those around him and destroy all the positive progress

³³ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, translated by Julie Rose (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), p. 221.

³⁴ ‘A Warning against Begrudging One’s Fief’, the Daishonin writes, ‘This life is like a dream. One cannot be sure that one will live until tomorrow. However wretched a beggar you might become, never disgrace the Lotus Sutra.’ (WND-1, p. 824)

he has made.

To achieve unshakeable victory, we need to challenge ourselves in earnest to change our karma. This is also the practice of human revolution, in which we strive to break through our inner darkness or ignorance. Carelessness is the greatest enemy. If we allow ourselves to grow complacent and lose our fighting spirit, then the shortcomings or negative tendencies that arise from our fundamental darkness will resurface. For that reason, the Daishonin consistently stresses the point that faith is life's ultimate treasure.

In this instalment, let us once more study the Daishonin's teaching that the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all.

Over and over I recall the moment, unforgettable even now, when I was about to be beheaded and you accompanied me, holding the reins of my horse and weeping tears of grief. Nor could I ever forget it in any lifetime to come. If you should fall into hell for some grave offence, no matter how Shakyamuni Buddha might urge me to become a Buddha, I would refuse; I would rather go to hell with you. For if you and I should fall into hell together, we would find Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra there. But if you depart from my advice even slightly, do not blame me for what may happen. Do not go around lamenting to others how hard it is for you to live in this world. To do so is an act utterly unbecoming to a worthy man. (WND-1, p. 850)

Never losing sight of the prime point of oneness of mentor and disciple

'If you become deadlocked, return to the prime point' – this was the guidance of first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.

The Lotus Sutra is based on the spirit of oneness of mentor and disciple. The Daishonin's Buddhism, too, is a teaching of mentor and disciple. Our prime point as practitioners, therefore, is our vow to struggle together with our mentor. If we constantly return to this prime point of mentor and disciple, we will never become deadlocked.

In this passage, the Daishonin reaffirms the incident that became the prime point in their relationship as mentor and disciple. It took place during the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.³⁵ As the Daishonin was being taken to the execution grounds, Shijo Kingo gripped the reins of his mentor's horse and declared that he was prepared to die at his side.

The Lotus Sutra is based on the spirit of oneness of mentor and disciple. The Daishonin's Buddhism, too, is a teaching of mentor and disciple.

Our prime point as practitioners, therefore, is our vow to struggle together with our mentor. If we constantly return to this prime point of mentor and disciple, we will never become deadlocked.

In praise of the faith that Shijo Kingo showed at that time, the Daishonin goes so far as to say, 'If you should fall into hell for some grave offence, no matter how Shakyamuni Buddha might urge me to become a Buddha, I would refuse; I would rather go to hell with you.' (WND-1, p. 850)

³⁵

Tatsunokuchi Persecution: On 12 September 1271, powerful figures in the government unjustly arrested the Daishonin and led him off in the middle of the night to the execution grounds on the beach at Tatsunokuchi on the outskirts of Kamakura, the seat of government, where they tried to execute him under cover of darkness. The execution attempt failed, and about a month later the Daishonin was exiled to Sado Island.

We find the ultimate essence of the Daishonin's humanistic teaching in his spirit to respond wholeheartedly to the sincere devotion of his disciples.

If the Daishonin and Shijo Kingo – mentor and disciple upholding steadfast faith in the Mystic Law – were to fall into hell, then Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra would also definitely be found there. In that case, the Daishonin explains, it would no longer be hell, but rather the realm of Buddhahood. This is the principle that 'hell can instantly be transformed into the Land of Tranquil Light'.³⁶

We can manifest the brilliance of the world of Buddhahood anywhere. This is the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Our first two presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, united by the bonds of mentor and disciple, demonstrated this with their own lives. In a prison cell that he described as 'cold to the extreme', Mr Makiguchi wrote, 'Depending on one's frame of mind, even hell can be enjoyable.'³⁷ And Mr Toda, who accompanied him to prison, remarked, 'Even if I should fall into hell, it wouldn't matter to me in the least. I would simply share the correct teaching with the inhabitants there and turn it into the Land of Tranquil Light.' This spirit is the very quintessence of faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism.

As long as Shijo Kingo doesn't lose sight of this spirit to struggle together with the Daishonin, he can triumph in any place and any situation, based on the principle that 'hell itself can instantly be transformed into the Land of Tranquil Light'. But if he is defeated by his own weakness, losing his temper and failing to show consideration to those around him, he will veer from the path of oneness with his mentor. This is why the Daishonin repeatedly warns him to be careful. He writes, 'If you depart from my advice even slightly, do not blame me for what may happen.' (WND-1, p. 850)

The key to victory lies in aligning our hearts with the heart of our mentor who faithfully embodies and propagates the Law. If we ignore our mentor's guidance and simply base ourselves on our own vacillating minds, we will not be able to complete the arduous path of Buddhist practice. A sutra states, 'Become the master of your mind rather than let your mind master you.' (WND-1, p. 502)³⁸ Only when we practise faith in the same spirit as our mentor can we truly become the master of our mind and attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

Do not go around lamenting to others how hard it is for you to live in this world. To do so is an act utterly unbecoming to a worthy man. (WND-1, 850)

Lamenting over our problems slows our spiritual development Here, the Daishonin especially castigates lamentation and self-pity. This passage gets at the heart of people's readiness to bewail matters that are beyond their control. Everyone is susceptible to doing this. Even Shijo Kingo, who was prepared to lay down his life alongside the Daishonin at a crucial moment, tended to have trouble with human relations because of his rigidity and single-mindedness, and may have given in to complaining in spite of himself. In advising Shijo Kingo not to go around lamenting to others, the Daishonin underscores that

³⁶ The world of hell, which is a realm of extreme suffering, can be instantly transformed into the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light where the Buddha dwells, or the world of Buddhahood.

³⁷ Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu (Collected Writings of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1987), vol. 10, p. 285.

³⁸ A quote from the Six Paramitas Sutra.

moaning about one's troubles or misfortunes is not the way of life of the wise, but the foolish. The Daishonin writes:

If a man behaves in this [unfortunate] way, then after he dies, his wife, overcome with sorrow at losing her husband, will tell other people about the shameful things he did, though she has no real intention of doing so. And that will in no way be her fault, but solely the result of his own reprehensible behaviour. (WND-1, p. 850)

Complaining nurtures one's inner weakness and negativity, and becomes a cause for stagnation. Here, the Daishonin is teaching Shijo Kingo that doing away with complaint and instead challenging his own human revolution head-on is the sure path to victory in life.

It is rare to be born a human being. The number of those endowed with human life is as small as the amount of earth one can place on a fingernail. Life as a human being is hard to sustain – as hard as it is for the dew to remain on the grass. But it is better to live a single day with honour than to live to 120 and die in disgrace. Live so that all the people of Kamakura will say in your praise that Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo [Shijo Kingo] is diligent in the service of his lord, in the service of Buddhism, and in his concern for other people. More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart! (WND-1, p. 851)

Become a true winner in life

It is rare to be born a human being: the number of those born with human life is 'as small as the amount of earth one can place on a fingernail'. In addition, human life is as hard to sustain 'as it is for the dew to remain on the grass'. The Daishonin thus indicates how irreplaceable our lives as human beings are, and how precious every single day and moment is.

'It is better to live a single day with honour than to live to 120 and die in disgrace' (WND-1, p. 851), the Daishonin declares, thereby highlighting the criterion for true merit in life. Our true merit as a human being arises from what we decide to make our life's purpose and how we go about achieving it.

Accordingly, the Daishonin offers this specific guidance to his disciple out of a wish for him to succeed on a fundamental level: 'Live so that all the people of Kamakura will say in your praise that [Shijo Kingo] is diligent in the service of his lord, in the service of Buddhism, and in his concern for other people.' (cf. WND-1, p. 851) It implies three particular areas in which Shijo Kingo needs to be victorious: (1) rebuilding a relationship of mutual trust with his lord, (2) continuing to make unwavering efforts as a practitioner of the Mystic Law, and (3) winning the trust of those around him. The treasures of the heart will shine in all these three endeavours. In other words, we are truly victorious when we bring forth the brilliance of our Buddha nature in all aspects of our life.

The Daishonin further teaches us to show actual proof of victory by striving to live in such a way that we will win the praise and admiration of those around us. This offers an important guideline as to what constitutes actual proof of victory for a Buddhist. In short, fundamental victory derives from the inner brilliance of our humanity that naturally draws others' admiration. It could also be said that an important part of our struggle for

kosen-rufu is for each of us to win such trust and respect in society.

It is the power of our humanity as Buddhists that ultimately inspires praise from others. In other words, the treasures of the heart we have cultivated are what win us others' trust and high regard as people of exemplary character. Our Buddha nature manifests as the brilliance of our humanity and touches the hearts of even those who do not practise the Daishonin's Buddhism. 'There's something different about those people. There is a special glow about SGI members,' people will think. Gaining such trust from others is definite actual proof of the power of our Buddhist practice.

Shijo Kingo's relations with those around him – from his lord Ema and the members of his lord's family to his colleagues, his brothers, and his fellow practitioners – were far from smooth. There were probably instances when his doggedness created problems. But without resolving such issues, he could not become a winner in faith.

That's why the Daishonin urges him to constantly work on polishing his character and show actual proof by realising a great human revolution. It was his wish that Shijo Kingo, as the central figure among his followers in Kamakura, would develop into an admirable leader in society and lead a life of profound significance and meaning. This compassionate spirit was no doubt behind the Daishonin's guidance encouraging him to win the praise of the people in Kamakura.

More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart! (WND-1, p. 851)

A thoroughly polished character is priceless above all The above passage is the most

well-known passage in this writing. 'Treasures in a storehouse'

indicates material assets, 'treasures of the body' means such things as health or acquired skills and 'treasures of the heart', on one level, means an inner richness, wealth, or abundance, and on another, more fundamental level, it means faith and the brilliance of the Buddha nature that is polished through faith.

In this passage the Daishonin indicates the order of priority of the three kinds of treasure, and sets forth a clear standard of value.

Shijo Kingo was in a situation where he faced the possibility of losing his estate. Of course, it goes without saying that this landholding represented an extremely important source of income for him and his family. But, the Daishonin insists that far more valuable than the treasures of the storehouse and the body are the treasures of the heart. The accumulation of these inner treasures, he says, is the basis for all victory.

The fact that Shijo Kingo had been challenging his situation based on faith in the Mystic Law corresponds to placing the highest value on the treasures of the heart. As a result, he had been victorious so far. That is probably why the Daishonin clarify this point as a universal and unchanging guideline for victory in all areas of his life.

And actually, when we base ourselves on the treasures of the heart, the true value and worth of the storehouse and the body also become apparent in our lives. In short, we need to make accumulating the treasures of the heart our fundamental purpose in life. If we lose sight of this elemental objective, but seek to accumulate the treasures of the storehouse and the body, it will only give rise to attachment. When that happens, fear of losing such material

or physical treasures can become a cause of suffering. It is therefore important above all to accumulate the treasures of the heart. This reflects a correct sense of purpose in life.

The worthy man Confucius held to his belief 'Nine thoughts to one word'³⁹, which means that he reconsidered nine times before he spoke. Tan, the Duke of Chou⁴⁰, was so earnest in receiving callers that he would wring out his hair three times in the course of washing it, or spit out his food three times in the course of a meal [in order not to keep them waiting]⁴¹. Consider this carefully so that you will have no cause to reproach me later. What is called Buddhism is found in this behaviour.

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 behaviour as a human being.

Respectfully.

The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals. (WND-1, 851-52)

Responding to others with sincerity is the foundation of Buddhism

Buddhism does not exist apart from the realities of life.

The Daishonin was extremely worried about Shijo Kingo's volatile temperament. Saying that he would like to relate 'an incident that is customarily kept secret'⁴² (WND-1, p. 851), he shares with his disciple the story of the irascible Emperor Sushun (r. 587-592) [who was murdered in a plot masterminded by one of his retainers]. It is a lesson about what can happen when one openly displays feelings treasures of antipathy towards others. (cf. WND-1, p. 851) Next, the Daishonin mentions how the great Chinese philosopher Confucius chose his words with such care that he thought nine times before speaking, and how the Duke of Chou in ancient China was so concerned not to keep guests waiting that he would even interrupt his meals or bath time to receive them. Through these examples, the Daishonin underscores the need for prudent thought and sincere conduct in our interactions with others.

'Consider this carefully,' says the Daishonin, seeking to deeply impress this message on Shijo Kingo. He sensed that his disciple wouldn't be able to achieve true victory in life if he failed to overcome his short temper – a flaw that could bring about his downfall – and did not earnestly set about accumulating the treasures of the heart. That is why the Daishonin goes so far as to say, 'What is called Buddhism is found in this behaviour.'

³⁹ From the Analects of Confucius.

⁴⁰ Tan the Duke of Chou: A younger brother of Emperor Wu, the founder of the Chou dynasty (c. 1100-256 B.C.E.) After assisting his brother in the task of overthrowing the Yin (Shang) dynasty and founding a new rule, he continued to be closely involved in the affairs of government. When Emperor Wu died and his son Ch'eng, who was still a child, came to the throne, the Duke of Chou acted as regent for the young ruler. He has been revered over the centuries by Confucianists as a model of correct government and propriety.

⁴¹ This anecdote is mentioned in Records of the Historian. Tan, the Duke of Chou, was so eager to find able persons and anxious not to overlook anyone that he would receive visitors even while washing his hair or during the course of a meal. The Daishonin cites this example to explain the importance of being considerate, cautious and prudent.

⁴² This incident is recorded in The Chronicles of Japan. Presumably it was not referred to openly because it involved the assassination of an emperor by one of his retainers.

Buddhism finds ultimate expression in our behaviour as human beings. Both Confucius and the Duke of Chou expressed their personal philosophy and creed in their actions. Likewise, unless we express in our conduct the supreme treasure of the heart expounded in Buddhism – namely, the Buddha nature manifesting itself from within – we will not be able to show actual proof of the power of faith or spread the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

That’s why at the end of this writing the Daishonin discusses the importance of our behaviour as human beings.

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’s⁴³ 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.

Respectfully.

The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals. (WND-1, 851–52)

The fundamental purpose of Buddhism lies in our behaviour as human beings

In concluding ‘The Three Kinds of Treasure’, the Daishonin states that the Lotus Sutra is the heart of Shakyamuni’s lifetime teachings, and that the essence of the practice taught in the Lotus Sutra is found in the behaviour of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who is described in the ‘Never Disparaging’ chapter as staunchly believing in and venerating the Buddha nature of all people.

Deeply apprehending the truth that everyone is a Buddha when viewed from the most fundamental perspective of life, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging continued to bow in reverence to all whom he met, no matter how much he was persecuted and attacked. This is the behaviour of one who truly embodies the spirit of the Lotus Sutra.

It is said that the Lotus Sutra represents the purpose for which Shakyamuni made his appearance in this world. The reason the Lotus Sutra describes the practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, who embodies the sutra’s spirit, is to indicate that the purpose of Shakyamuni’s appearance in this world lies in his behaviour as a human being.

As the Daishonin notes when he says, ‘The Law does not spread by itself: because people propagate it, both people and the Law are respectable’ (GZ, p. 856),⁴⁴ the greatness of the Law or teaching can only be conveyed and spread when it is expressed in the humanistic actions and behaviour of those who embrace it.

⁴³

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging: A bodhisattva described in the ‘Bodhisattva Never Disparaging’ (20th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. This bodhisattva – Shakyamuni in a previous lifetime – would bow in reverence to everyone he met. However, he was attacked by arrogant people, who beat him with sticks and staves and threw stones at him. The sutra explains that his practice of respecting others’ Buddha nature became the cause for him to attain Buddhahood.

⁴⁴ ‘Hyaku Rokka Sho’ (The One Hundred and Six Comparisons); not included in WND, vols. 1 and 2.

The treasures of the heart in themselves are invisible to the eye. When these inner treasures are given concrete expression as respectful actions towards others, they demonstrate and prove to others the power of the Mystic Law and the Buddha nature.

Viewing the treasures of the heart as the most valuable of all (cf. WNKAD-1, p. 851) reflects a sense of values concerned with what is most important and precious in life. Showing respect to others in our actions, meanwhile, constitutes the standard for our behaviour as Buddhists based on this sense of values.

The universally respectful behaviour of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging embodies the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which expounds the Buddha's true intent of enabling all people to attain enlightenment. Therefore, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's respectful behaviour towards others is itself the true intent of the Buddha.

Being able to manifest our Buddha nature is a benefit of faith in the Mystic Law. The behaviour of those who embody this benefit can serve as actual proof of the greatness of the Mystic Law. Their behaviour is sure to be characterised by respect for others.

Let us now reconfirm, based on the sutra, how Bodhisattva Never Disparaging – Shakyamuni in a previous lifetime – lived in a way that was always respectful to others.

At the start of the 'Bodhisattva Never Disparaging' (20th) chapter, Shakyamuni explained the principle that those who slander the Lotus Sutra will incur severe retribution for their offence, while those who are slandered on account of upholding the Lotus Sutra will gain the benefit of the purification of the six sense organs.⁴⁵ (cf. LSOC20, p. 307)

As an example, he introduced the practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. This bodhisattva appeared in the Middle Day of the Law⁴⁶ after the death of a Buddha called Awesome Sound King. It was an age when arrogant monks held great power and the correct teaching of the Law was in decline. At that time, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging bowed in reverence to the four kinds of believers of the day who were overbearingly arrogant – monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen – saying to them, 'I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance.

Why? Because you will all practise the bodhisattva way and will then be able to attain Buddhahood.' (LSOC20, p. 308) This declaration concisely expresses the core teaching of the Lotus Sutra that all people can attain enlightenment, and it is called the '24-character Lotus Sutra' [in reference to the number of Chinese characters that make up this passage]. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's practice solely consisted of bowing to others in reverence and greeting them with these words.

The four kinds of believers, however, being filled with arrogance and contempt, responded to his sincere respect with curses and abuse, some even beating him with sticks or pelting him with stones. Through enduring these persecutions, Never Disparaging was able to 'wipe out his offences'⁴⁷(cf. LSOC20, p. 312) and transform his karma. The sutra relates how, as he was

⁴⁵Purification of the six sense organs: Also, purification of the six senses. This refers to the six sense organs of eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind becoming pure, making it possible to apprehend all things correctly. The 'Benefits of the Teacher of the Law' (19th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra explains that those who uphold and practise the sutra acquire 800 benefits of the eyes, nose and body, and 1,200 benefits of the ears, tongue and mind, and that through these benefits the six sense organs become refined and pure.

⁴⁶The Middle Day of the Law here does not refer to the Middle Day after the death of Shakyamuni Buddha, but after the death of Buddha Awesome Sound King. The successive periods of the Former Day, the Middle Day, and the Latter Day of the Law were also applied to other Buddhas appearing in Buddhist scriptures. Accordingly, the teaching of each Buddha has its own Middle Day of the Law.

⁴⁷ The line, 'When his offences had been wiped out' (LSOC20, p. 312), describes how Bodhisattva Never

nearing death, he heard in the air countless verses of the Lotus Sutra that had previously been preached by the Buddha Awesome Sound King.

Embracing them all, he gained the benefit of the purification of the six sense organs, extended his life span by 'two hundred ten thousand million nayutas of years' and continued widely preaching the Lotus Sutra for others. He then attained Buddhahood and was reborn as Shakyamuni. (cf. LSOC20, pp. 309-10)

In contrast, the four kinds of believers who had persecuted Bodhisattva Never Disparaging underwent great suffering for the immensely long period of a thousand kalpas as a result of these offences, and when they had expiated their offences, they were able to again encounter Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and receive his instruction. (cf. LSOC20, pp. 310-11)

In this way, steadfastly showing respect for others through our behaviour has the power to change our life by transforming our karma and purifying our six sense organs. And by respectfully sharing the teachings of the Lotus Sutra with others as long as we live, we can achieve the fundamental victory of attaining Buddhahood. Such actions are based on a firm commitment to the principle that all people possess the Buddha nature. By holding fast to this commitment even in the face of hardships, we can embody this principle in our life. As such, our efforts are part of our own Buddhist practice for attaining Buddhahood. In addition, they are part of the struggle to lead all people to enlightenment by brightly illuminating even the lives of those who slander and harass the practitioners of the correct teaching and awakening the Buddha nature dormant in the depths of their lives.

In short, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's actions of respect for others constitute the fundamental cause for attaining Buddhahood. Such actions are crucial if we hope to gain enlightenment. The aspiration of leading all people to enlightenment would just be a pipe dream unless the Buddha taught the importance of our behaviour as human beings. That is why the Daishonin asserts that this is 'the purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings'. (WND-1, p. 852)

Nichiren Daishonin also always demonstrated respect for others through his actions. The Buddha nature will definitely manifest in the lives of those who arouse and maintain faith in the Mystic Law, no matter how evil the times. Their behaviour as human beings will definitely pulse with the fundamental wisdom of the practical philosophy of respect for others. The Daishonin's practice of shakubuku, of rigorously refuting error, is also grounded in a spirit of compassion for the individual in error and of concern for the happiness of the people, as well as a fervent wish for the peace and security of the land. It is a struggle to refute the erroneous and reveal the true out of respect for the Buddha nature of all people. Because shakubuku in the Daishonin's Buddhism is based on a philosophy of respect for others, it means to refute the error of those who disrespect the lives of others. Premised on this understanding, the Daishonin indicates that, even in the evil and slanderous age of the Latter Day, we need to act in a prudent and respectful manner, rather than simply rushing in to refute error.

Fully and unequivocally stating the truth is also shakubuku. The Latter Day of the Law is an age rife with distrust and fear stemming from a society in which people are not respected and life Hosting the Earth Charter International/SGI touring exhibition on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is one way members are creating dialogue in their communities is held in low regard. In such an age, shakubuku means standing up alone and resolutely holding high the banner of respect for human beings and the sanctity of life. This, too, is the

Disparaging eradicated his past offences of slandering the Law through undergoing persecution.

courageous practice of shakubuku.

As I am always affirming, resolving the various problems of our planet in the 21st century will hinge on focusing on the human being. This is an awareness that is shared by many leading thinkers, peace activists and conscientious political leaders.

How do we transform the fundamental darkness inherent in people's lives? How do we expand the solidarity of those dedicated to the cause of good? And how do we construct a society in which harmonious coexistence and humanism prevail?

The SGI is taking action to pioneer a magnificent path of intercultural and interfaith dialogue towards finding answers to those very questions. Transcending all differences, surmounting barriers of ethnicity and nationality, we are constructing a realm of broad and open exchange between human beings. The philosophy of the SGI is based on the Lotus Sutra's teaching of showing respect for others through our actions, as well as the principle that all change begins from within ourselves and from accumulating the treasures of the heart.

People around the world have high expectations for the SGI's humanistic philosophy. Our efforts in doing our human revolution provide hope to humankind.

We have now entered an age when the sincere endeavours of our members, who are putting into practice the humanistic behaviour taught by Nichiren Daishonin, are winning trust and understanding on a global scale. ●

Section D: The priesthood issue

Study material part 6

Repudiating the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood under Nikken⁴⁸

From the SGI Study department series 'The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism for the New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu' (SGI Newsletter No. 9990)

Since its establishment, the Soka Gakkai has grounded itself completely on faith that is directly connected to Nichiren Daishonin. It has consistently taken action to spread the Daishonin's Buddhist teachings to create happiness for all people and bring about world peace. However, a group emerged that sought to destroy this movement for kosen-rufu, and in doing so that group, known as the 'Nikken sect', revealed its true nature as a devilish function.

The Nikken sect refers to the priesthood of the Nichiren Shoshu Buddhist school in its corrupt state under the leadership of Nikken Abe [d. 2019], who claimed to be the 67th in the lineage of its high priests. This sect has taken the position that its high priest, who is also its chief administrator, possesses absolute and uncontested authority and power.

In the more than a quarter of a century since instigating what has become known as the 'second priesthood issue' in 1990, the Nikken sect has betrayed the teachings and spirit of Nichiren Buddhism and has become a group given over to slander of the Buddhist Law.

Though Nikken transferred the office of high priest to a successor, Nichinyo, in December 2005, the lineage he has passed on continues to be muddled by his slander of the Law.

The battle against evil functions

In his treatise 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land', Nichiren

Daishonin writes, 'Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil' (WND-1, p. 15) and 'The only thing to do now is to abandon the evil ways and take up those that are good, to cut off this affliction at the source, to cut it off at the root.' (WND-1, p. 17)

In other words, in striving to practise Buddhism correctly, it is essential never to forget to wage a continuous battle against the 'one evil', that is, negative influences that delude people and lead them astray.

Speaking out against the 'enemies of the Lotus Sutra'

Nichiren Buddhism emphasises that admonishing and striving against evil is an important element of faith.

The Daishonin writes, 'However great the good causes one may make, or even if one reads and copies the entirety of the Lotus Sutra a thousand or ten thousand times, or attains the way of perceiving three thousand realms in a single moment of life, if one fails to denounce the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, it will be impossible to attain the way.' (WND-1, p. 78)

The 'enemies of the Lotus Sutra' refers to those who encourage people to abandon the

⁴⁸ SGI Newsletter 9990.

Lotus Sutra and thereby close off the path to Buddhahood for all people.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that the Buddha nature exists in the life of every person, expressing the most universal ideal of respect for all human beings. For this reason, to deny or deprecate the sutra, to impede the spread of the sutra, or to oppress or harm practitioners of the sutra is to oppose the ideals of respect for the dignity of life, the equality of all people, and the primacy of ordinary people. To engage in such acts is what it means to become an 'enemy of the Lotus Sutra'.

In light of this, one figure from the Daishonin's lifetime who can be cited as a prime example of an enemy of the Lotus Sutra is Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple.⁴⁹ While outwardly garnering respect from people of the time, many of whom revered him as a 'living Buddha', Ryokan covertly harboured animosity towards the Daishonin, who was striving to spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, and conspired to have him persecuted. In doing so, he functioned as what the Lotus Sutra describes as an 'arrogant false sage'.⁵⁰ In contemporary times, by scheming to destroy the Soka Gakkai, the organisation working to accomplish the Daishonin's will of kosen-rufu, it is Nikken who accords with the definition of an enemy of the Lotus Sutra.

An overview of the priesthood issue

The Daishonin's spirit and practice for kosen-rufu was correctly inherited and carried on by his disciple Nikko Shonin (1246-1333).

That spirit and practice, however, gradually waned within the priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu – a Buddhist school that derived its teachings from the lineage of Nikko Shonin – giving way to hollow formality and ritual. As a result, the school turned into what has often been described in Japan as 'funeral Buddhism'.⁵⁰ In the process, the priests took on an increasingly authoritarian posture, adopting a discriminatory attitude towards lay believers.

By the time the Soka Gakkai was established, the correct understanding and practice of the Daishonin's teachings had been all but lost within the priesthood.

The Soka Gakkai focused its efforts on realising the great vow for kosen-rufu, and had always supported the priesthood while correcting it whenever necessary.

After the Second World War, when the priesthood faced severe economic problems, the Soka Gakkai earnestly and sincerely supported and protected it, and eventually built and donated more than 350 temples.

However, elements within the priesthood refused to acknowledge or express gratitude for this earnest support, and friction at times arose with certain priests who were intent first and foremost on maintaining their religious authority. But in every case, the Soka Gakkai persisted in working to resolve the situation and restore good relations.

The priesthood's tendency to flaunt its authority and look down on lay believers became more pronounced after Nikken took the office of high priest, as it increasingly disregarded the sincere intentions with which the Soka Gakkai had been supporting it for the sake of kosen-rufu.

⁴⁹ Ryokan (1217-1303): A priest of the True Word Precepts school and chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple from 1267. For many years, Ryokan harassed Nichiren and his disciples, both openly and covertly.

⁵⁰ Temples in Japan collected money and other offerings as payment for performing funeral services and other rituals, amassing wealth in the process. With both power and wealth at their command, Buddhist priests lost interest in the study and practice of the teachings, and instead grew decadent and corrupt. As a result, Buddhism in Japan changed into a religion that stressed ceremonies, such as funerals and services for deceased ancestors – giving rise to the name 'funeral Buddhism'.

The Soka Gakkai had been making great strides in establishing Nichiren Buddhism as a world religion, and its leader, SGI President Ikeda, had become highly respected among notable world figures in many fields. Nevertheless, Nikken came to regard him with enmity and began plotting to destroy the Soka Gakkai.

Nikken's aim was to sever relations with the Soka Gakkai and take control of its members, turning them into subservient followers of the priests, and in 1990 he conceived and put into action a surreptitious plan he named 'Operation C' ('C' meaning to 'cut' the Soka Gakkai).

Its implementation began in December that year, with the priesthood's sudden announcement of a revision to its rules as a religious corporation effectively dismissing President Ikeda from his position as chief lay representative of Nichiren Shoshu.

The Soka Gakkai sought to address and resolve the situation through dialogue, but the priesthood refused any discussion.

On 7 November 1991, the priesthood sent the Soka Gakkai a document entitled 'Remonstrance to Disband', followed, on 28 November, by a 'Notice of Excommunication'. In addition to this high-handed move, it took the cruel measure of refusing to confer the Gohonzon upon members of the Soka Gakkai. The priests were telling people, in effect, that if they wished to receive the Gohonzon, they could do so only by following the priesthood. In this way, they were holding the Gohonzon, the basis of faith, hostage in a cowardly attempt to pressure and intimidate believers.

Nevertheless, in 1993, the Soka Gakkai decided that it would confer upon its members around the world a Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan Shonin (1665-1726), a great restorer of Nichiren Buddhism. This was made possible through the cooperation of a temple that had opposed Nikken's actions and supported the Soka Gakkai.

The Soka Gakkai is now the only religious group working to achieve kosen-rufu in direct accord with Nichiren Daishonin's spirit, conferring upon believers the Gohonzon, which he described as 'the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra'. (WND-1, p. 831) As such, the Soka Gakkai has become the global organisation qualified to confer the Gohonzon in order to realise kosen-rufu, the Buddha's will and intent.

In 1998, the Nikken sect demolished the Sho-Hondo (Grand Main Temple), an edifice at the Nichiren Shoshu head temple, Taisei-ji, built in 1972 under the aegis of the Soka Gakkai through the sincere faith and contributions of some eight million people. This reckless act made the priesthood's malicious and vindictive nature all the more apparent.

The Sho-Hondo, constructed to last 1,000 years, was hailed as a masterpiece of 20th-century architecture that rivalled any religious edifice in the world. Nikken, however, heartlessly had it demolished just 26 years after its completion, disregarding the sincere faith of eight million believers.

The major offences and erroneous doctrines of the Nikken Sect

Core to the Nikken sect is a deluded belief that venerates its high priest as a special, absolute and infallible being, a belief that might be called 'high priest worship'. One of the premises for this claim is that there exists a mysterious heritage or lineage that is only passed on from one high priest to the next, a presumption that bolstered the priesthood's tendency to look down on lay believers.

Of course, there is nothing in Nichiren Daishonin's writings to justify or support this in any way, and it therefore constitutes a false doctrine that is starkly opposed to the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism.

Careful study of the essential principles of Nichiren Buddhism makes clear the key errors of the Nikken sect.

(1) The slander of destroying kosen-rufu

The Nikken sect implemented its 'Operation C' with the aim of destroying the Soka Gakkai, the organisation dedicated to kosen-rufu, and in 1991 it sent the Soka Gakkai its notification of excommunication.

The document cited no passages from Nichiren Daishonin's writings and expressed no doctrinal basis to support the Soka Gakkai's excommunication. It simply repeated its assertion in an authoritarian and emotional manner that the Soka Gakkai was not obediently following the priesthood.

The task of achieving kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, is the legacy left by Nichiren Daishonin. This is evident when he declares, 'The "great vow" refers to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra' (OTT, p. 82) and 'When you are so united, even the great desire for widespread propagation can be fulfilled.' (WND-1, p. 217)

It is for this reason that the Soka Gakkai has aimed since its founding to accomplish kosen-rufu, exerting itself in the propagation of Nichiren Buddhism, not only in Japan but throughout the world.

To attempt to destroy the Soka Gakkai, therefore, is to attempt to destroy kosen-rufu, an act that constitutes a grave slander of the Buddhist Law and the great offence of betraying the Daishonin's spirit and intent to save all people from suffering. **Nikken's grave offence of**

causing disunity in the Buddhist Order

The Buddhist teachings describe the greatest offences a person can commit as the 'five cardinal sins'.

These are (1) killing one's father, (2) killing one's mother, (3) killing an arhat, (4) injuring a Buddha and (5) causing disunity in the Buddhist Order.

Among these offences, causing disunity in the Buddhist Order, or actions that create disruption and division among the body of Buddhist practitioners, is extremely serious as it destroys the Buddha's teachings and deludes people, causing them to fall into unhappiness. This is the gravest offence that Nikken has committed.

(2) The false doctrine of worship of the high priest

It is the doctrine of the Nikken sect that the high priest be regarded as an object of worship or veneration. A high priest should be a person who is primarily responsible for protecting, teaching and spreading the Buddhist teachings. This person should serve as a model for carrying out faith, practice and study, and for upholding the correct teachings.

In this regard, since the outbreak of the second priesthood issue, Nikken and his supporters, rejecting any dialogue, have consistently claimed that because the high priest is infallible and an object of worship or veneration, one must follow him without question.

The idea of the high priest as an object of faith is an extremely vain doctrine that violates the three treasures – the Buddha, the Law (the Buddha's teachings), and the Buddhist Order – of Nichiren Buddhism.

For example, a document carried in a publication for Nichiren Shoshu senior priests in July 1991 states that the high priest to whom the heritage of the Law has been transmitted is

an honourable entity that is one and inseparable with the Dai-Gohonzon, and that faith in these two fundamental objects (the Dai-Gohonzon and the high priest) must be absolute.

In Nichiren Buddhism, however, there should be just one object of devotion: the Gohonzon.

The Nikken sect's erroneous doctrine purports that the high priest, whose function should be to protect the Gohonzon, in fact stands on an equal par with the Gohonzon. This is a dogma of unprecedented distortion.

Correct faith means basing oneself on the Gohonzon

Since the time of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin, correct faith has been defined as faith based upon the Gohonzon.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, 'Believe in this mandala with all your heart' (WND-1, p. 412) and 'Since Nichiren's disciples and lay supporters believe solely in the Lotus Sutra... they can enter the treasure tower of the Gohonzon.' (WND-1, p. 832)

And Nikko Shonin states, 'It is specified in the honourable writings [of Nichiren Daishonin] that the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo should be the object of devotion. That is, the object of devotion he inscribed in his own hand.' (GZ, p. 1606)

The error of regarding the high priest as infallible

In 'The Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko,'⁵¹ he writes, 'Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views.' (GZ, p. 1618)

Nikko Shonin issued this warning based on his assumption that it was possible that in the future the head of the school might commit a serious error.

In the same document, Nikko Shonin writes, 'My disciples should conduct themselves as holy priests, patterning their behaviour after that of the late master. However, even if a high priest or a priest striving for practice and understanding should temporarily deviate from the principle of sexual abstinence, he may still be allowed to remain in the priesthood as a common priest without rank.' (GZ, p. 1619)

This means that if a high priest or a senior priest of considerable learning should commit a prohibited act or serious error that by rights would warrant expulsion, he should rather be allowed to renew his practice among priests of ordinary rank, while pursuing a basic path of reflection and contrition.

From these 'Admonitions of Nikko', it is clear that the view that the high priest is infallible promoted by the Nikken sect is completely misguided. It is a dogma that violates the teachings of both the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.

(3) A mistaken view of heritage

'Heritage' or 'lineage' in Nichiren Buddhism has always been something open to all people, not the exclusive possession of an elite few.

However, Nikken and his followers hold an erroneous view of heritage which is the source of their notion that the high priest is absolute.

That view is as follows: There exists a mysterious heritage or lineage that is passed on

⁵¹'Nikko Yuikai Okibumi' in Japanese. Written by Nikko Shonin in 1333. It addresses practitioners of future generations, exhorting them to maintain the purity of Nichiren's teachings, and outlines the fundamental spirit of faith, practice and study.

only from one high priest to the next. Simply by receiving that lineage, one exclusively inherits the Buddha's enlightenment and the essence of the Buddha's Law itself.

In the same publication cited earlier, the Nikken sect states that the transmission of the 'heritage of the Law' entrusted to only one person is surely the entity that embodies the 'oneness of person and Law'.

The idea of the existence of such a mysterious transmission is false, however, and bears no relation at all to the teachings of the Daishonin or Nikko Shonin. It amounts to a fiction concocted in later times in order to bolster the status and authority of the high priest.

The true meaning of 'heritage' is faith that is open to all people

The Japanese term for heritage, literally 'bloodline', is used frequently in the esoteric teachings of the True Word school and by schools such as Tendai and Zen. It likens the transfer of the teachings from teacher to disciple to the genetic heritage passed from parent to child. In the Buddhist world of Nichiren Daishonin's time, this heritage predominantly meant the passing on of the deepest Buddhist teachings to a select group of individuals in the form of a 'secret transmission'.

In contrast to this, in 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life', the Daishonin writes, 'Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood.' (WND-1, p. 217)

In Nichiren Buddhism, the heritage is ultimately described as the 'heritage of faith' (WND-1, p. 218) that is, as faith itself.

On the other hand, the Nikken sect claims a mysterious, exclusive heritage that, upon receipt, automatically makes one a Buddha regardless of faith or practice. This is far removed from the essential meaning of the heritage of faith, the heritage taught by the Daishonin.

(4) Discriminatory attitude towards the laity

An idea that permeates the entire Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, from Nikken to all the priests, is the idea that they, as priests, are superior and that lay believers are inferior. That is, they adopt a discriminatory attitude towards the laity.

There is no teaching or principle within Nichiren Buddhism that would justify priests treating lay persons with such disrespect or contempt.

On the contrary, the Daishonin clearly confirmed the equality of clergy and laity, saying, 'For this reason, the Buddha surely considers anyone in this world who embraces the Lotus Sutra, whether lay man or woman, monk or nun, to be the lord of all living beings' (WND-1, p. 463) and 'Anyone who teaches others even a single phrase of the Lotus Sutra is the envoy of the Thus Come One, whether that person be priest or layman, nun or laywoman.' (WND-1, p. 33)

Behind the Nikken sect's blatant denial of the equality of clergy and laity is the degradation of the role of Buddhism in Japan, primarily during the Edo period (1603-1867), to the extent that it became known as 'funeral Buddhism', and the spread of the so-called temple parishioner system⁵² during the same period. This resulted in priests exerting control over lay believers and

⁵² The temple parishioner system was a means by which families were affiliated officially with a local Buddhist temple during the regime of the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603-1867). It was a mandatory system of citizen registration intended to detect "hidden Christians"—those secretly practicing Christianity, which had been outlawed. It was also a way for government, with the temples as proxies, to monitor and control the population.

forcing them into a servile position, while lay believers came to depend entirely on the priests, rather than carry out their own Buddhist practice.

The harmful tendencies and errors inherent in the temple parishioner system remain deeply ingrained in the Nikken sect, and this has resulted in a belief that priests are superior to laity.

(5) Misuse of religious rituals

One of the major errors of the Nikken sect is its misuse of Buddhist rituals and ceremonies, turning them into means for making money. These include funeral and memorial services, the bestowal of posthumous Buddhist names, and the issuing of wooden memorial tablets to be placed beside the grave.

Such rituals conducted by priests nowadays were not instituted by the Daishonin, but became established in later times. The Nikken sect asserts that unless a funeral service is conducted by a priest, the deceased will be unable to attain Buddhahood; but the Daishonin never taught or stated anything of the sort.

Rather, he encouraged those who had lost loved ones with such statements as

‘Therefore, because your beloved departed father chanted Nam-myoho-rence-kyo while he was alive, he was a person who attained Buddhahood in his present form.’ (WND-1, p. 1064)

In this way, he stressed that attaining Buddhahood depends on one’s own faith and practice while alive.

Therefore, to ignore the Daishonin’s guidance and assert that the deceased cannot attain Buddhahood unless a priest conducts their funeral, in itself constitutes the offence of distorting the Daishonin’s teachings.

(6) Corruption and immorality

With regard to the conduct of priests, Nichiren Daishonin states, ‘True priests are those who are honest and who desire little and yet know satisfaction.’ (WND-1, p. 747)

The priests of the Nikken sect, however, beginning with Nikken himself, have consistently behaved in a corrupt and self-indulgent manner, in stark violation of the Daishonin’s instruction. The Daishonin compared any such irresponsible priest who uses Buddhism for selfish gain to ‘an animal dressed in priestly robes’ (WND-1, p. 760) or to ‘Law-devouring hungry spirits’. (WND-1, p. 191)

Spiritual independence

28 November 1991 marked the day that the Soka Gakkai was excommunicated from the Nichiren Shoshu school. To Soka Gakkai members, however, this day marks the day they achieved their spiritual independence. Freeing themselves from the chains of the corrupt and misguided priesthood, Soka Gakkai members have emerged all around the globe, embracing their mission to achieve kosen-rufu. Their numbers have steadily grown, until today they are active in 192 countries and territories worldwide.

The Nikken sect, on the other hand, has continued on its course of decline, its membership today a mere two percent of what it was before it excommunicated the Soka Gakkai.

Under the system, individuals and families were not permitted to change religious affiliation. People were expected to visit their assigned temple and rely on it to conduct funeral and memorial ceremonies, to offer donations for these services, and thereby provide the temples with a permanent source of income.

By striving to achieve the Daishonin's will for kosen-rufu, the Soka Gakkai has succeeded to the true heritage of Nichiren Buddhism. Resolutely challenging and refuting the false and destructive actions of the Nikken sect, Soka Gakkai members are opening the way for the further expansion of kosen-rufu throughout the world. ●