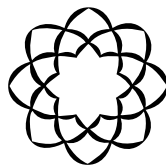


Introductory Exam Study Guide 2022

Introductory Exam Study Guide 2022

Compiled by the SGI-USA Study Department



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Introduction

Study is a vital aspect of our Buddhist practice. Preparing for and taking the SGI-USA Introductory Exam is an opportunity for members and guests to deepen their understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings through studying his writings, Ikeda Sensei's commentaries, various Buddhist concepts, and the history of Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI.

Sensei says:

The aim of our Buddhist practice is to carry out our own limitless human revolution and, at the same time, to advance the great movement for kosen-rufu, bringing peace and happiness to all humanity.

Nichiren clearly sets forth the fundamental path for making that a reality, stating: "Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism" ("The True Aspect of All Phenomena," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 386).

Practice means to chant for kosen-rufu and take courageous action to share Buddhism with others. Study means to read and study the Daishonin's writings and make ceaseless efforts to deepen our understanding of Buddhism for our own happiness and that of others. (November 15, 2013, *World Tribune*, p. 12)

He also offers this message to those involved with study exams:

I am chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo that each and every person taking the upcoming study exams will become a victor in faith. I would also like to express my deepest appreciation to members who are supporting the participants in their study efforts, and to the leaders who are giving study lectures and helping members gain a solid grounding in Buddhist study. (November 15, 2013, *World Tribune*, p. 4)

Features of the Introductory Exam

The first level of the SGI-USA study program is the Introductory Exam. It is a pass/no pass graded exam with twenty multiple-choice questions. Please check with your local leaders for exam locations, dates and times.

Who can take the Introductory Exam?

Any SGI-USA member who has not taken or who did not pass a previous Introductory Exam may take this exam. This exam is also open to guests.

How to prepare for the exam?

This study guide includes all the material for the Introductory Exam.

(Note: All the material appeared previously in SGI-USA publications or on sokaglobal.org. We've made some minor revisions, however, so please use this study guide to prepare for the exam.

“Winter Always Turns to Spring”

Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring. Never, from ancient times on, has anyone seen or heard of winter turning back to autumn. Nor have we ever heard of a believer in the Lotus Sutra who turned into an ordinary person.

—“Winter Always Turns to Spring”
The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 536

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to the lay nun Myoichi in May 1275. During his exile to Sado Island (from 1271 to 1274), Nichiren's believers in Kamakura, including the lay nun and her husband, suffered harassment and oppression. Despite having their estate confiscated, the couple persevered in faith. After losing her husband, Myoichi, who suffered from weak health herself, maintained strong faith as she raised their small children alone. Through this letter, Nichiren tries to dispel her sorrow and anxiety while explaining that believers in the Lotus Sutra are as if in the midst of winter but that winter unfailingly turns to spring.

Ikeda Sensei's Guidance

If . . . in the midst of life's winters, we refrain from the struggle of progressing in faith, if we doubt

the power of faith and slacken in our Buddhist practice, we will end up with incomplete results at best. Even for cherry trees, it is said, if the period of winter chill required for breaking dormancy is insufficient, the flowering of the buds will be delayed and the blossoms will be irregular. The key to victory in our lives lies in how hard we struggle when we are in winter, how wisely we use that time, and how meaningfully we live each day confident that spring will definitely come.

Faith in the Lotus Sutra means bravely making our way through the winters of adversity. By taking on the arduous task of changing our karma, we are able to greet the

spring and build happiness and good fortune in our lives.¹

• • •

No matter how cold and bitter the winter, spring will definitely come. All who have faith in the Lotus Sutra will attain Buddhahood without exception. Nichiren Buddhism exists so that those who have suffered the most can achieve happiness. As members of the SGI, we earnestly take action to help people overcome all kinds of hardships and sufferings and usher in a springtime of hope and victory in their lives.²

Federica Giusti / Unsplash



“The True Aspect of All Phenomena”

There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku. At first only Nichiren chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, but then two, three, and a hundred followed, chanting and teaching others. Propagation will unfold this way in the future as well.

—“The True Aspect of All Phenomena”
The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 386

Background

The Daishonin wrote this letter in May 1273 while exiled on Sado Island. It was addressed to Sairen-bo, who was also in exile there. The letter discusses the concept of “the true aspect of all phenomena,” which teaches that . . . all forms and realities that exist, both concrete and abstract, are manifestations of the Mystic Law.

Nichiren expresses that, as a Bodhisattva of the Earth, he has been entrusted to spread this Mystic Law and that those devoted to propagating this teaching with “the same mind as Nichiren” are themselves Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

He urges his followers to exert themselves in faith, practice, and study.

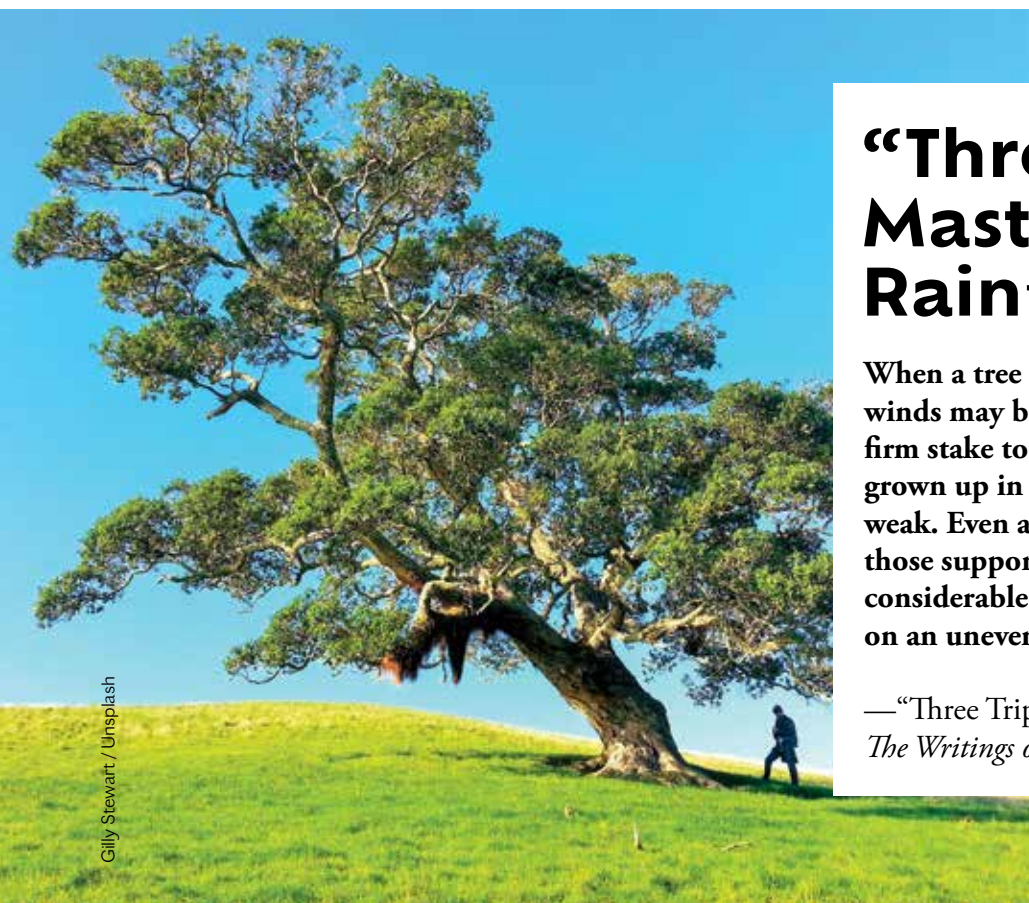
Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance

We of the SGI are comrades who have joined together in dedicating our lives to the vow of kosen-rufu. We have striven selflessly, with “the same mind as Nichiren,” to realize Nichiren’s will and decree.

Moreover, we are fulfilling our noble mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth to propagate “the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo,” or the Mystic Law, in a spirit of equality and mutual respect, in accordance with the Daishonin’s admonition that there should be no discrimination between men or women [see WND-1, 385].

He writes further: “At first only Nichiren chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, but then two, three, and a hundred followed, chanting and teaching others. Propagation will unfold this way in the future as well.” We, too, practice in exact accord with this eternal and unchanging formula for the progression of kosen-rufu.

The spirit to stand up alone, to take personal initiative, is the core spirit and essence of the SGI. My mentor, Josei Toda, called out to young people: “Youth, just one of you stand! A second and then a third will definitely follow!” Our members around the world have indeed demonstrated that when one pioneering individual takes the lead, “two, three, and a hundred will follow.” In many localities and regions, kosen-rufu has started from a single individual and from there spread to another person and then another. Through such steady, persevering efforts to share Buddhism with others, we have created the great current of kosen-rufu we have today.³



“Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain”

When a tree has been transplanted, though fierce winds may blow, it will not topple if it has a firm stake to hold it up. But even a tree that has grown up in place may fall over if its roots are weak. Even a feeble person will not stumble if those supporting him are strong, but a person of considerable strength, when alone, may fall down on an uneven path.

—“Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain”
The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 598

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to the lay priest Nishiyama, who, despite various pressures from the authorities, continued to uphold his faith and visit Nichiren.

The opening of this letter explains the importance of “good friends”—those who assist or encourage one in Buddhist practice. In the Latter Day of the Law, a time when the world is rife with misguiding views and “evil companions”—those who hinder one’s quest for enlightenment—Nichiren stresses how rare it is to encounter a “good friend.”

Thus, he calls on Nishiyama to strive together with a “good friend” who will help him carry out correct practice of Buddhism.

Ikeda Sensei’s Guidance

The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of true good friends, who stand in the same spirit as their mentor and expand a realm of support to help all people reveal their Buddha nature. . . .

When we respect and value our fellow members in the course of our day-to-day SGI activities, we are practicing the correct teaching in accord with the Buddha’s intent.

There may well be times when one finds it somewhat challenging to work with other members, who may have different personalities or backgrounds. Young people, in particular, often find organizations restrictive and stifling, and many may think it is easier and more pleasant to be on one’s own.

There is also a strong tendency these days for people to try to avoid direct interaction with others. But that trend deprives us of the opportunity to make the most of our differing personalities, to praise and support one another, and to cultivate our tolerance and understanding. As a result, we may end up being unable to appreciate the pain and suffering of others, control our own anger, or patch up even small differences and misunderstandings.

• • •

The important thing, when all is said and done, is to apply ourselves to our human revolution and continue practicing with steady faith that is like flowing water. The Soka Gakkai is our training ground in this effort.⁴

? Review Questions

LEARNING FROM NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S WRITINGS

1. Who is the recipient of Nichiren Daishonin's writing "Winter Always Turns to Spring"? (See p. 1)

2. In the letter "Winter Always Turns to Spring," Nichiren says: "Never, from ancient times on, has anyone seen or heard of winter turning back to autumn. Nor have we ever heard of a believer in the Lotus Sutra who turned into an ordinary person." What does this mean? (See p. 1)

3. In "The True Aspect of All Phenomena," Nichiren says: "Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku." What does this mean? (See p. 2)

4. What does Ikeda Sensei say is the core spirit and essence of the SGI? (See p. 2)

5. In "Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain," Nichiren writes, "When a tree has been transplanted, though fierce winds may blow, it will not topple if it has a firm stake to hold it up" (WND-1, 598). Here, he is stressing how rare it is to encounter a _____. (See p. 3)

6. Sensei says that the Soka Gakkai is a gathering of true good friends who stand in the same spirit as _____ and expand a realm of support to help all people reveal their Buddha nature. (See p. 3)



Annie Spratt / Unsplash



Korevi / Pexel

The Life of Nichiren Daishonin

Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82) dedicated his life to propagating the Mystic Law—*Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*—motivated by an unwavering commitment and compassion to eradicate suffering and enable all people to reveal their innate Buddhahood. He encountered unrelenting hardship and persecution throughout his life as he sought to address and put an end to the evils obstructing the happiness of the people.

Early Years

The Daishonin was born on February 16, 1222,¹ in the coastal hamlet of Kataumi in

Tojo Village of Nagasa District in Awa Province (part of present-day Kamogawa City in Chiba Prefecture). He was the son of commoners, his family earning its livelihood from fishing.

At the age of twelve, he began his schooling at a nearby temple called Seicho-ji. During this period, he made a vow to become the wisest person in Japan (see “The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei,” WND-1, 175). He sought to gain the wisdom of the Buddhist teachings for overcoming the fundamental sufferings of life and death and thereby lead his parents and all people to genuine happiness.

At the age of sixteen, in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the Buddhist teachings, he formally entered the priesthood at Seicho-ji, receiving instruction from Dozen-bo, a senior priest there. It was shortly thereafter, the Daishonin writes, that he attained “a jewel of wisdom as bright as the morning star” (“The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei,” WND-1, 176). This can be interpreted to mean wisdom regarding the Mystic Law that is the essence of Buddhism.

The Daishonin then traveled to Kamakura, Kyoto, Nara, and other centers of Buddhist learning, carefully studying the sutras and commentaries housed at leading temples such as Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, the headquarters of the Tendai school, and familiarizing himself with the core doctrines of each school. He confirmed that the Lotus Sutra is the foremost among all the Buddhist sutras and that the

Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to which he had awakened is the essence of the sutra and provides the means for freeing all people from suffering on the most fundamental level. He also awoke to his mission to spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the teaching for people in the Latter Day of the Law² to attain enlightenment.

The Declaration of the Establishment of His Teaching

Through his studies at leading Buddhist centers, the Daishonin confirmed his mission to spread the Mystic Law—Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—and the means by which to do so. He embarked on his struggle knowing that he would inevitably encounter great opposition and persecution.

On April 28, 1253, around noon at Seicho-ji temple, he refuted the Nembutsu and other Buddhist teachings of his day as erroneous and proclaimed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to be the sole correct Buddhist teaching for leading all people in the Latter Day of the Law to enlightenment. This is known as the declaration of the establishment of his teaching. He was thirty-two years old. From around this time, he adopted the name Nichiren (literally, sun lotus).

The Daishonin's denunciation of the Nembutsu doctrines on the occasion of declaring his teaching enraged Tojo Kagenobu, who was the local steward (an official of the Kamakura government who had the powers of law enforcement and tax collection) and an ardent Nembutsu believer. Kagenobu planned

an armed attack on the Daishonin, but the Daishonin narrowly managed to escape beforehand.

The Daishonin then made his way to Kamakura, the seat of the military government. There, he took up residence in a small dwelling in Nagoe (at a site that later came to be known as Matsubagayatsu) and embarked in earnest on propagating his teaching. While refuting the error of the Nembutsu and Zen teachings, which had gained wide influence among the people of Kamakura, the Daishonin spread the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

It was during this early period of propagation that such well-known disciples as Toki Jonin, Shijo Kingo (Shijo Yorimoto), and Ikegami Munenaka (the elder of the Ikegami brothers) converted to his teaching.

Submitting “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” and Encountering Persecution

In the period when the Daishonin began his propagation efforts in Kamakura, Japan had been experiencing a series of natural disasters and calamities, including extreme weather, severe earthquakes, famine, fires, and epidemics. In particular, the devastating earthquake of the Shoka era, which struck the Kamakura region in August 1257, destroyed many homes and important buildings in Kamakura.

This disaster prompted the Daishonin to write the treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching

The Daishonin urged people to discontinue their reliance on such erroneous teachings and embrace faith in the correct teaching of Buddhism without delay, for this would ensure the realization of a peaceful and prosperous land.

for the Peace of the Land” (see WND-1, 6–26) to clarify the fundamental cause of people’s suffering and set forth the means by which people could eradicate such suffering. On July 16, 1260, he submitted this treatise to Hojo Tokiyori, the retired regent of the Kamakura military government who was still effectively the country’s most powerful leader. It was the first time that the Daishonin remonstrated with the authorities. This is known as his first remonstrance with the government authorities.

In this treatise, he declared that the cause of the successive calamities lay with people’s slander of the correct teaching of Buddhism and their reliance on erroneous doctrines. The most serious root cause, he asserted, was the Nembutsu teaching popularized in Japan by the priest Honen.

The Daishonin urged people to discontinue their reliance on such erroneous teachings and embrace faith in the correct teaching of Buddhism without delay, for this would ensure the realization of a peaceful and prosperous land. Continued reliance on erroneous teachings, he warned, would inevitably result in the country encountering internal strife and foreign invasion—the two calamities of the three calamities and seven disasters³ yet to occur.

However, the ruling authorities ignored the Daishonin’s sincere remonstrance and, with their tacit approval, Nembutsu followers began plotting to persecute the Daishonin.

One evening shortly after the Daishonin submitted his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” a group of Nembutsu believers stormed his dwelling in an attempt to take his life. This is called the Matsubagayatsu Persecution. However, the Daishonin escaped unharmed. After this incident, he left Kamakura for a short period.

On May 12, 1261, the following year, having returned to Kamakura sometime earlier, the Daishonin was arrested by the authorities and sentenced to exile in Ito in Izu Province. This is called the Izu Exile. After being pardoned from exile in February 1263, the Daishonin made his way back to Kamakura.

In 1264, he returned to his home province of Awa to visit his ailing mother. On November 11 of that year, the Daishonin and a group of his followers were on their way to the residence of another follower named Kudo in Amatsu (also in Awa Province). At a place called Matsubara in Tojo Village, they were ambushed by a band of armed men under the command of the local steward, Tojo Kagenobu. In the attack, the Daishonin sustained an injury to his forehead and a broken left hand. One of his followers was killed at the site. This is called the Komatsubara Persecution.

The Tatsunokuchi Persecution and “Casting Off the Transient and Revealing the True”

In 1268, an official letter arrived in Kamakura from the Mongol Empire demanding that Japan become one of its tributaries and threatening military attack should the demand be rejected. With this development, the danger of the calamity of foreign invasion befalling the nation became very real.

This spurred the Daishonin to write eleven letters of remonstrance to top government officials, including Regent Hojo Tokimune, and the heads of major Buddhist temples in Kamakura. In the letters, he stated that the impending danger of an invasion was just as he had predicted in his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” and he expressed the hope that the priests of the various Buddhist schools would meet with him in an official public debate.

Neither the government leaders nor the religious establishment heeded the Daishonin’s appeal. Rather, viewing the Daishonin’s community of believers as a threat to the existing power structure, the government began to take repressive measures against it.

Around this time, True Word priests were enjoying growing influence, the government having charged them with the mission of conducting prayers for the defeat of Mongol forces. Ryokan (also known as Ninsho) of Gokuraku-ji temple in Kamakura, a priest of the True Word Precepts school, was also becoming more influential through his connections with powerful government figures.

The Daishonin fearlessly began to refute the errors of the established Buddhist schools that were exerting a negative influence on the people and society as a whole.

In the summer of 1271, in response to a prolonged drought, the government ordered Ryokan to pray for rain. Learning of this, the Daishonin made a proposal to Ryokan: if Ryokan should succeed in producing rain within seven

days, the Daishonin would become his disciple; but if he failed to do so, then Ryokan should place his faith in the Lotus Sutra.

When his prayers failed to produce any rain after seven days had passed, Ryokan asked for a seven-day extension. Again no rain fell, but fierce gales arose instead. Ryokan had clearly lost the challenge.

Rather than honestly acknowledge defeat, however, Ryokan grew even more hostile toward the Daishonin. He contrived to bring accusations against the Daishonin by filing a false complaint with the government in the name of a Nembutsu priest Ryokan had close ties with. He also used his influence with top government officials as well as their wives to have the Daishonin persecuted by the authorities.

Although Ryokan was widely respected among the populace as a devout and virtuous priest, he enjoyed the trappings of power and privilege and colluded with government officials toward self-serving ends.

On September 10 of the same year (1271), the Daishonin was summoned by the government and interrogated by Hei no Saemon-no-jo Yoritsuna (also known as Taira no Yoritsuna), the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs (the chief being the regent himself). The Daishonin admonished him and emphasized the proper attitude for the nation’s rulers based on the correct teaching of Buddhism.

Two days later, on September 12, Hei no Saemon-no-jo, leading a group of armed soldiers, conducted a raid on the Daishonin’s dwelling and arrested him, treating him as if he were a traitor. On that occasion,

strongly remonstrating with Hei no Saemon-no-jo, the Daishonin stated that in persecuting him they had “just toppled the pillar of Japan” (“The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra,” WND-1, 766) and warned that this would cause the calamities of internal strife and foreign invasion to descend on the land. The events on September 10 and 12 marked his second remonstrance with the government authorities.

Late that night, the Daishonin was suddenly taken by armed soldiers to the beach at Tatsunokuchi on the outskirts of Kamakura. This was at the directive of Hei no Saemon-no-jo and others who conspired to have the Daishonin secretly beheaded there. Just as the executioner raised his sword to strike, however, a brilliant orb of light burst forth from the direction of the nearby island of Enoshima, shooting northwest across the sky. The soldiers were terrified, and the attempt to kill the Daishonin had to be abandoned. This is called the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.

This persecution had extremely important significance for the Daishonin. In triumphing over the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, he cast off his transient status as an ordinary, unenlightened person burdened with karma and suffering and, while remaining an ordinary human being, revealed his original, true identity as a Buddha possessing infinite wisdom and compassion (the Buddha of beginningless time or eternal Buddha). This is called casting off the transient and revealing the true.

Thereafter, the Daishonin’s behavior was that of the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, and he went on to inscribe the Gohonzon for all people to revere and embrace as the fundamental object of devotion.

The Sado Exile

While the government was deliberating on his fate following the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, the Daishonin was housed for about a month at the residence of Homma Shigetsura (the deputy provincial military governor of Sado) in Echi, Sagami Province (part of present-day Atsugi City, Kanagawa Prefecture). During this period, the Daishonin’s followers in Kamakura were subjected to many forms of persecution, including being unjustly accused of arson, murder, and other crimes.



Sebastian Voortman/Pexel

In triumphing over the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, he cast off his transient status as an ordinary, unenlightened person burdened with karma and suffering and, while remaining an ordinary human being, revealed his original, true identity as a Buddha possessing infinite wisdom and compassion.

Eventually, the Daishonin was sentenced to exile on Sado Island (part of present-day Niigata Prefecture). He departed from Echi on October 10, arriving at the graveyard of Tsukahara on Sado on November 1. The dwelling he was assigned there was a small, dilapidated hut called Sammai-do, which had been used for funerary rites. The conditions the Daishonin faced were truly harsh. It was bitterly cold on Sado, and he lacked sufficient food and warm clothing. In addition, he was surrounded by hostile Nembutsu followers who sought to take his life.

The Daishonin's followers in Kamakura also continued to suffer persecution. Some were even imprisoned or banished or had their lands confiscated. The majority of his remaining followers began to have doubts and discarded their faith out of fear and a desire for self-preservation.

On January 16 and 17, 1272, several hundred Buddhist priests from Sado and nearby provinces on the mainland gathered at Tsukahara with the intent to kill the Daishonin. They were stopped by Homma Shigetsura, who proposed that they engage the Daishonin in a religious debate instead. In the debate that ensued, the Daishonin thoroughly refuted the erroneous teachings of the various Buddhist schools of his day. This is known as the Tsukahara Debate.

In February, a faction of the ruling Hojo clan rose up in rebellion, and fighting broke out in Kamakura and Kyoto, the seat of the military government and imperial capital, respectively. This is known as the Disturbance of the Second Month

or the Hojo Tokisuke Rebellion. The Daishonin's prediction of internal strife had come true just 150 days after declaring it in his remonstrance with Hei no Saemon-no-jo at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.

In early summer of that year, the Daishonin was transferred from Tsukahara to Ichinosawa, also on Sado, but his life continued to be threatened by angry Nembutsu followers.

During the Sado Exile, Nikko Shonin, who later became the Daishonin's successor, faithfully followed and served him and shared his sufferings. The Daishonin also steadily gained followers while on Sado Island, including Abutsu-bo and his wife, the lay nun Sennichi.

The Daishonin composed many important works during his exile on Sado. Of special significance are "The Opening of the Eyes" and "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind."

"The Opening of the Eyes," written in February 1272, explains that the Daishonin is the votary of the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law who is practicing in exact accord with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Ultimately, it reveals his identity as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law endowed with the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent to lead all people in the latter age to enlightenment.

"The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," completed in April 1273, presents the object of devotion of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to be embraced by all people in the Latter Day of the Law in order to attain Buddhahood.

In February 1274, the Daishonin was pardoned, and in March he

departed from Sado and returned to Kamakura.

Meeting Hei no Saemon-no-jo in April, the Daishonin strongly remonstrated with him, denouncing the government's actions in ordering priests to pray for the defeat of the Mongols based on the True Word and other erroneous Buddhist teachings. Further, responding to a direct question from Hei no Saemon-no-jo, he predicted that the Mongol invasion would most certainly take place before the year's end. This marked his third remonstrance with the government authorities.

Just as the Daishonin predicted, a large Mongol fleet attacked Kyushu, the westernmost of Japan's four main islands, in October 1274. This is referred to as the first Mongol invasion.

With this event, the two predictions he had made in "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land"—those of internal strife and foreign invasion—had come true.

This was the third time that the Daishonin had directly remonstrated with the government authorities and predicted that disasters would befall the country. Affirming that his predictions had been fulfilled, the Daishonin wrote, "Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge" ("The Selection of the Time," WND-1, 579).

Taking Up Residence at Mount Minobu

When the government rejected his final remonstrance, the Daishonin decided to leave Kamakura and take up residence in Hakii Village on

the slopes of Mount Minobu in Kai Province (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture). The local steward was Hakii Sanenaga, who had become a follower of the Daishonin through the propagation efforts of Nikko Shonin.

The Daishonin moved to Mount Minobu in May 1274. His change of residence, however, was by no means a retreat from the world.

He composed many of his major works there, including "The Selection of the Time" and "On Repaying Debts of Gratitude." In these writings, he elucidated numerous important teachings—in particular, the Three Great Secret Laws (the object of devotion of the essential teaching, the sanctuary of the essential teaching, and the daimoku of the essential teaching).

Through lectures on the Lotus Sutra, he devoted himself to fostering disciples who would carry out kosen-rufu—broadly teaching and spreading the Mystic Law to realize peace and happiness for all people—in the future.

During this period, he also wrote many letters to his lay followers throughout the country, patiently instructing and encouraging them so they could persevere with strong faith, win in life, and attain the state of Buddhahood.

The Atsuhara Persecution and the Purpose of the Daishonin's Appearance in This World

After the Daishonin moved to Mount Minobu, Nikko Shonin actively led propagation efforts in the Fuji area of Suruga Province (present-day central

Through lectures on the Lotus Sutra, he devoted himself to fostering disciples who would carry out kosen-rufu—broadly teaching and spreading the Mystic Law to realize peace and happiness for all people—in the future.

Shizuoka Prefecture), successfully convincing many Tendai priests and followers to abandon their old religious affiliations and begin practicing the Daishonin's teaching.

This prompted harassment and persecution by local Tendai temples, and threats were directed at those who had embraced the Daishonin's teaching.

On September 21, 1279, twenty farmers who were followers of the Daishonin in Atsuhara, a village in Suruga Province, were arrested on trumped-up charges and taken to Kamakura. At the residence of Hei no Saemon-no-jo, they were subjected to harsh interrogation equivalent to torture. Though they were pressed to abandon their faith in the Lotus Sutra, they all remained true to their beliefs.

Three of the twenty followers arrested—the brothers Jinshiro, Yagoro, and Yarokuro—were ultimately executed, while the remaining seventeen were banished from their places of residence. This series of events is known as the Atsuhara Persecution.

The example of these farmer followers persevering in faith without begrudging their lives convinced the Daishonin that humble, ordinary people without any position in society had developed sufficiently strong faith to withstand great persecutions. In “On Persecutions Befalling the Sage,” dated October 1, 1279, in the twenty-seventh year after proclaiming his teaching, he refers to the purpose of his appearance in this world (see WND-1, 996).



Ken Shono / Unsplash

While still little more than a child, the Daishonin had vowed to become a person of wisdom who understood the essence of Buddhism and to free all people from suffering at the most fundamental level. The fulfillment of that vow was his life's guiding purpose. Expounding the teaching of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the fundamental Law for the enlightenment of all people, and revealing the Three Great Secret Laws, he established the foundation for kosen-rufu that would endure for all time.

During the Atsuhara Persecution, ordinary people who embraced faith in Nam-myoho-enge-kyo that encompasses the Three Great Secret Laws, dedicated themselves to kosen-rufu without begrudging their lives. Their appearance demonstrated that the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin was a teaching that would be championed by ordinary people, a teaching for the enlightenment of all humanity. The Daishonin thus fulfilled the purpose of his appearance in this world.

At the time of the Atsuhara Persecution, the Daishonin's followers strove in faith with the united spirit of many in body, one in mind. His youthful disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu, steward of a village neighboring Atsuhara, worked tirelessly to protect his fellow believers.

The Daishonin's Death and Nikko Shonin's Succession

On September 8, 1282, the Daishonin, who was in declining health, left Minobu, where he had resided for nine years. He departed with the

stated intent of visiting the therapeutic hot springs in Hitachi Province (part of present-day Ibaraki and Fukushima Prefectures) at the recommendation of his disciples. When he arrived at the residence of his follower Ikegami Munenaka (the elder of the Ikegami brothers) in Ikegami in Musashi Province (present-day Ota Ward, Tokyo), he began to make arrangements for after his death.

On September 25, in spite of being gravely ill, he is said to have given a lecture to his followers on his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land."

The Daishonin passed away at Ikegami Munenaka's residence on October 13, 1282, at the age of 61, bringing to a close his noble life as the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

After the Daishonin's death, only Nikko Shonin carried on his mentor's fearless spirit and actions for kosen-rufu. Based on his awareness as the Daishonin's successor, Nikko Shonin continued to speak out against slander of the Law and to remonstrate with the government authorities. He treasured every one of the Daishonin's writings, referring to them as honorable writings (Jpn *gosho*), and encouraged all disciples to read and study them as the sacred scripture for the Latter Day of the Law. He also fostered many outstanding disciples who exerted themselves in Buddhist practice and study.

During the Atsuhara Persecution, ordinary people who embraced faith in Nam-myoho-enge-kyo that encompasses the Three Great Secret Laws, dedicated themselves to kosen-rufu without begrudging their lives. Their appearance demonstrated that the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin was a teaching that would be championed by ordinary people.

? Review Questions

THE LIFE OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN

7. On what day and year was Nichiren Daishonin born? (See p. 5)

8. What vow did Nichiren make as a youth while studying at Seicho-ji temple? (See p. 5)

9. On April 28, 1253, what did Nichiren do at Seicho-ji temple? (See p. 6)

10. After April 28, 1253, why did Nichiren go to Kamakura? (See p. 6)

11. A series of calamities and disasters, including a devastating earthquake, prompted Nichiren to submit a treatise to the retired regent Hojo Tokiyori on July 16, 1260. What was the title of this treatise? (See pp. 6–7)

12. What did Nichiren seek to do in writing this treatise? (See p. 7)

13. How did the authorities react to Nichiren's remonstrations? (See p. 7)

14. While visiting Awa Province, on November 11, 1264, a band of armed men led by the local steward, Tojo Kagenobu, attacked Nichiren and his party. During the attack, Nichiren sustained injuries to his forehead and left hand. What is this persecution called? (See p. 7)

15. In the summer of 1271, the government ordered the True Word Precepts priest Ryokan to pray for rain to alleviate a prolonged drought. Nichiren proposed that if Ryokan succeeded in producing rain within seven days, the Daishonin would become his disciple; but if he failed to do so, then Ryokan should place his faith in the Lotus Sutra. What was the result? (See p. 8)

16. On September 12, 1271, Hei no Saemon-no-jo, leading a group of armed soldiers, arrested Nichiren at his dwelling in Kamakura, treating him as if he were a traitor. What did Nichiren say to Saemon-no-jo and the armed soldiers on that occasion? (See p. 9)

17. In triumphing over the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, Nichiren, while remaining an ordinary human being, revealed his original identity as a Buddha possessing infinite wisdom and compassion. This is called _____

_____ in Buddhism. (See p. 9)

18. Early on in his exile to Sado Island, Nichiren was assigned to live at Sammai-do, a dilapidated shrine in Tsukahara. On January 16 and 17, 1272, several hundred Buddhist priests from Sado and nearby provinces on the mainland gathered at Tsukahara with the intent to kill him. What took place next? (See p. 10)

19. Among the many vital works that Nichiren Daishonin composed while exiled on Sado, which two are thought to be especially significant? (See p. 10)

20. When the government rejected the Daishonin's final remonstrance, he decided to leave Kamakura and, in May 1274, took up residence at Mount Minobu in Kai Province. What activities did he engage in at Minobu? (See p. 11)

21. On September 21, 1279, twenty farmers who were the Daishonin's followers in Atsuhara Village were

arrested on trumped-up charges and taken to Kamakura. There, Hei no Saemon-no-jo harshly pressed them to abandon their faith in the Lotus Sutra. Three of the twenty were executed, but all remained true to their beliefs. This series of events, known as the Atsuhara Persecution, convinced the Daishonin that humble, ordinary believers had developed sufficiently strong faith to withstand great persecutions. What did their appearance demonstrate to Nichiren? (See p. 13)

22. The Daishonin died at Ikegami Munenaka's residence on October 13, 1282. Just before his death, which writing did he deliver a lecture on? (See p. 13)

23. After Nichiren's death, Nikko Shonin, out of his awareness as the Daishonin's successor, continued to speak out against slander of the Law and remonstrate with the government authorities. What else did he do? (See p. 13)



Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essence of Buddhism and the fundamental Law perceived by Nichiren Daishonin for resolving the suffering of all humanity. Here, we will examine a few of the important aspects of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Fundamental Law That Pervades the Universe and Life

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental Law that pervades the entire universe and all life.

Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, viewed the sufferings of all people as his own and searched for a way to resolve those sufferings. In the process, he awakened to the truth that the eternal, all-pervading, fundamental Law of the universe and life existed within his own being. This realization led to his being known as Buddha, or awakened one. Then, with wisdom and compassion, he expounded numerous teachings, which later were compiled as Buddhist sutras. Among them, the Lotus Sutra teaches the true essence of the Buddha's enlightenment.

Shakyamuni awakened to the truth that the eternal all-pervading, fundamental Law of the universe and life existed within his own being. This realization led to his being known as Buddha, or awakened one.

Nichiren Daishonin identified this Law to which Shakyamuni awakened—the Law that can resolve human suffering on a fundamental level and open the way to genuine happiness—as Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo*.

The Essential Law for Attaining Buddhahood

Buddhas are those who have embodied the Law in their own lives, overcome all suffering, and established an unshakable inner state of absolute happiness.

The Law of Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo* is the essential principle, or means, for attaining buddhahood.

The Eternal Law Inherent in All People's Lives

Buddhas are awakened to the truth that the Law exists within not only their own lives but also the lives of all people. They realize that this all-pervasive Law transcends the bounds of life and death and can never be lost or destroyed.

The Law of Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo* is universal, inherent in all people; it is also eternal, persisting throughout the three existences of past, present, and future.

The Profound Meaning Reflected in the Name, Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo*

The profound meaning of the fundamental Law is reflected in its name, Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo*.

Myoho-*renge-kyo* is the full title of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese and translates as “the Lotus Sutra of the

wonderful (mystic) law.”

Because the Law expounded in the Lotus Sutra is difficult to fathom and comprehend, it is called the Mystic Law (*myoho*).

The lotus (*renge*) is used as a metaphor to describe the distinctive characteristics of the Mystic Law.

Though it grows in muddy water, the lotus remains unsullied by its environment, producing pure and fragrant blooms. This conjures images of those who have faith in and practice the Mystic Law. Though they live in the real world that is rife with suffering, they remain pure in thought and action, teaching others and guiding them to enlightenment.

In addition, the lotus, unlike other plants, contains a seed pod (the lotus fruit) within its buds, and the flower and fruit grow and appear at the same time. The flower (the cause) and the fruit (the effect) exist together, simultaneously. This is also used to illustrate that the state of Buddhahood, though indiscernible, exists even in the lives of ordinary people who have not yet manifested that state of life and, further, that even after one becomes a Buddha, one does not lose the life states that characterize an ordinary person.

Kyo, meaning sutra, indicates that the Lotus Sutra (Myoho-*renge-kyo*) contains the eternal truth—the Mystic Law—and that people should venerate and place their faith in it.

Nam, or *namu*, is the phonetic rendering in Chinese characters of the Sanskrit word *namas*, meaning bow or reverence. This term was also translated using the Chinese characters meaning to dedicate one's life (*kimyo*). To dedicate one's

When we realize that we are inherently Buddhas and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself, we can bring forth in our lives wonderful benefit and good fortune without measure. There is no greater joy in life.

life, in this sense, means to devote oneself body and mind to the Law and strive to practice and embody it with one's entire being.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the very heart and essence of the Buddha, which is expressed in wise and compassionate action to lead all people to enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin's Enlightened State of Life

Although the Lotus Sutra teaches the fundamental Law of the universe and life, it does not reveal the exact nature or name of the Law.

Nichiren Daishonin awakened to the truth that the Law expounded in the Lotus Sutra existed in his own life, and he revealed that Law to be Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

In other words, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is not simply Myoho-renge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra, prefaced by the word *nam*, but the name of the Law itself.

By revealing the Law to be Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Daishonin opened the way in real terms for fundamentally freeing people from suffering and delusion, which arise from ignorance of the true nature of their lives, and helping them build unshakable happiness.

That is why we revere Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, an age filled with confusion and suffering.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the en-

lightened life state of Buddhahood, or true identity, of the Daishonin, who embodied in his being the Law that pervades the universe and all existence.

Ordinary People Are Themselves the Mystic Law

The life state of Buddhahood is also inherent in the lives of unenlightened ordinary people—in every person. All people are inherently and originally Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself.

However, while ignorant of this truth, ordinary people are unable to demonstrate the power and functions of the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that exist within them. To be awakened to this truth is the life state of a Buddha; to doubt or be unaware of this truth is the life state of one who is unenlightened. When we have faith in and actually practice Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the power and functions of the Mystic Law are activated and expressed in our lives, and in this way we manifest the life state of Buddhahood.

The Object of Devotion for Practice, Revealed in the Form of a Mandala

Nichiren Daishonin depicted his own Buddhahood, or enlightened life state, in the form of a mandala. He made this the object of devotion (Jpn

gohonzon) for our Buddhist practice so that we ordinary people can manifest Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in our lives and attain Buddhahood, just as he did.

The Daishonin writes: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (WND-1, 832).

It is important that we revere Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—the fundamental Law and the life state of Buddhahood embodied in the Gohonzon—believing and accepting that it is inherent in our own lives. By doing so, we can tap the Mystic Law that resides within us and manifest our inherent Buddhahood.

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings states: “Great joy [is what] one experiences when one understands for the first time that one's mind from the very beginning has been a Buddha. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys” (OTT, 211–12).

When we realize that we are inherently Buddhas and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself, we can bring forth in our lives wonderful benefit and good fortune without measure. There is no greater joy in life.

When we triumph over hardships through our practice of the Mystic Law, we will lead lives of unsurpassed joy while developing a state of eternally indestructible happiness.

? Review Questions

NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO

24. Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, searched for a way to resolve people's sufferings. In the process, he realized the truth that the eternal, all-pervading, fundamental Law of the universe and life existed within his own being. This realization lead him to be known as (see p. 16):

25. The lotus (*renge*) is used as a metaphor to describe the distinctive characteristics of the Mystic Law. For instance, the lotus remains unsullied by its muddy environment. What does this mean for those who practice the Mystic Law? (See p. 17)

26. The lotus (*renge*) is used as a metaphor to describe the distinctive characteristics of the Mystic Law. The flower (cause) and fruit (effect) of the lotus grow and appear at the same time. What does this illustrate for ordinary people? (See p. 17)



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27. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the heart and essence of the Buddha, which is expressed in wise and compassionate action to lead all people to enlightenment. In this phrase, what does *nam* mean? (See pp. 17–18)

28. We revere Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law because he awakened to the truth that the Law expounded in the Lotus Sutra existed in his own life, revealing this Law to be Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and opening the way in real terms for what? (See p. 18)

29. The life state of Buddhahood is inherent in the lives of ordinary people. However, while _____ of this truth, ordinary people are unable to demonstrate their inherent power. _____ to this truth through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, that power and function are activated. (See p. 18)

30. Why did Nichiren inscribe the object of devotion (Gohonzon)? (See p. 18)



31. Nichiren writes: “Never seek this _____ outside yourself. The _____ exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832). (See p. 18)

32. *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* states: “Great joy [is what] one experiences when one understands for the first time that one’s mind from the very beginning has been a Buddha.

is the greatest of all joys” (pp. 211–12). (See p. 18)

Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime

Buddhahood is the state of awakening that a Buddha has attained. The word *enlightenment* is often used synonymously with Buddhahood. Buddhahood is regarded as a state of perfect freedom, in which one is awakened to the eternal and ultimate truth that is the reality of all things. This supreme state of life is characterized by boundless wisdom, infinite compassion, and undaunted courage.

The fundamental purpose of our Buddhist faith and practice is to attain the life state of Buddhahood.

The purpose of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, in addition to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime on an individual level, is to secure happiness for others as well.

By embracing faith in the Gohonzon and striving sincerely in Buddhist practice for oneself and others, anyone can realize the state of Buddhahood in this existence. This is the principle of "attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime."

Practice for oneself means to carry out Buddhist practice for one's own benefit. Practice for others means to teach and guide others to Buddhist practice so that they, too, can experience benefit. Specifically, practice for oneself and others indicates doing gongyo and chanting daimoku, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, while also reaching out to talk with others about Buddhism, teaching and guiding them and thereby propagating the Mystic Law.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote:

If votaries of the Lotus Sutra carry out religious practice as the sutra directs, then every one of them without exception will surely attain Buddhahood within his or her present lifetime. To cite an analogy, if one plants the fields in spring and summer, then, whether it be early or late, one is certain to reap a harvest within the year. ("The Doctrine of Three

The purpose of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, in addition to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime on an individual level, is to secure happiness for others as well.

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Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life,” WND-2, 88)

Attaining Buddhahood, or becoming a Buddha, does not mean becoming some kind of special human being completely different from who we are now, nor does it mean being reborn in a pure land far removed from this world in our next lifetime.

The Daishonin explains the “attain” of attaining Buddhahood as follows: “‘Attain’ means to open or reveal” (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 126). Attaining Buddhahood, therefore, simply means revealing our innate Buddhahood.

As ordinary people, we can reveal this enlightened state of life just as we are. This is expressed in the Buddhist concepts of “the attainment of Buddhahood by ordinary people” and “attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form.”

Attaining Buddhahood does not mean going to some other world. Rather, it means establishing a state of absolute and indestructible happiness here in the real world.

The Daishonin says that “one comes to realize and see that each thing—the cherry, the plum, the peach, the damson—in its own entity, without undergoing any change, possesses the eternally endowed three bodies [of a Buddha]”⁴ (OTT, 200). As this passage suggests, attaining Buddhahood means living in a way in which we make the most of our unique inherent qualities and develop our potential to the fullest.

In other words, in attaining Buddhahood our lives are purified, allowing us to give full expression to

their inherent workings; we gain a strong inner state that is not swayed by any hardship.

Attaining Buddhahood is not the achievement of a final goal. The state of Buddhahood is characterized by an unremitting struggle based on faith in the Mystic Law to eliminate evil and generate good. Those who strive tirelessly for kosen-rufu are Buddhas.

“The Attainment of Buddhahood by Ordinary People” and “Attaining Buddhahood in One’s Present Form”

The terms “ordinary person” or “common mortal” appear frequently in Buddhist sutras and texts, indicating an unenlightened person. The Lotus Sutra teaches that ordinary people inherently possess the life state of Buddhahood and that they can reveal that state of life. That is, it is possible for us to manifest within us that noble life state as ordinary people. This is expressed in such Buddhist terms as “ordinary people are identical with the highest level of being” (OTT, 22) and “an ordinary person is a Buddha” (WND-1, 36).

Attaining Buddhahood is a process of manifesting the life state of a Buddha, which is originally present within all people (the inherent world of Buddhahood). A Buddha, therefore, is not a special being separate from or superior to human beings. The Daishonin taught that attaining Buddhahood is revealing the highest humanity—that is, Buddhahood—in our lives as ordinary people.

This is called “attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form.” This means that people can realize the

life state of a Buddha just as they are without having to be reborn and changing their present form as an ordinary person.

Though Mahayana sutras other than the Lotus Sutra teach the attainment of Buddhahood, they all require at least two conditions.

The first is that one not belong to any of the following groups, which were deemed incapable of attaining Buddhahood: practitioners of the two vehicles (voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones), evil people, and women.

Practitioners of the two vehicles believed that it was impossible for them to attain the elevated life state of the Buddha and so contented themselves with seeking to gain the stage of arhat—the highest stage of awakening in the teachings for the voice-hearers. These practitioners aimed for the annihilation of body and mind in arriving at this stage, in which all earthly desires were completely extinguished, ending the cycle of rebirth into this world. Many Mahayana sutras harshly condemned such practitioners as being unable to attain Buddhahood.

These sutras also taught that evil people had to first be reborn as good people, and women be reborn as men, before they could attain Buddhahood. Neither evil people nor women were considered able to attain Buddhahood as they were. Though these sutras taught the pos-

sibility of attaining Buddhahood, only a limited number of people could meet the requirements to actually do so.

The second condition for attaining Buddhahood in Mahayana sutras other than the Lotus Sutra was that one had to engage in Buddhist practice over repeated cycles of birth and death (known as countless kalpas of practice) in order to free oneself from the life state of an unenlightened, ordinary person and achieve the life state of a Buddha.

In contrast, the Lotus Sutra teaches that attaining Buddhahood is not a matter of becoming some sort of exceptional or extraordinary being, but that each person can reveal the life state of Buddhahood within them just as they are.

Nichiren Daishonin further clarified that the fundamental Law by which all Buddhas attain enlightenment is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. He also manifested his enlightened state of life that is one with that Law in the form of the Gohonzon—the object of devotion of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

By embracing faith in the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, anyone can reveal the Buddhahood inherent in his or her life.

Nichikan⁵ wrote, “If we accept and believe in this object of devotion and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo to it, then our lives are themselves the object of devotion

of three thousand realms in a single moment of life; we are the founder, Nichiren Daishonin.”

By believing in the Gohonzon and continuing to exert ourselves in faith and practice for the sake of kosen-rufu, we can manifest in our lives as ordinary people the same life state of Buddhahood as Nichiren Daishonin.

This is also expressed as the principles of attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form and attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.

“Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment” and “The Sufferings of Birth and Death Are Nirvana”

The idea of attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form can be expressed from another distinct perspective as the principles that “earthly desires are enlightenment” and “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana.”

Even ordinary people whose lives are dominated by earthly desires, burdened by negative karma, and afflicted by suffering, can, by awakening to the reality that Buddhahood exists within their own lives, manifest the wisdom of a Buddha’s enlightenment, liberate themselves from suffering, and realize a state of complete freedom.

A life tormented by earthly desires and suffering can become a life of limitless freedom that shines with

Even ordinary people whose lives are dominated by earthly desires, burdened by negative karma, and afflicted by suffering, can, by awakening to the reality that Buddhahood exists within their own lives, manifest the wisdom of a Buddha’s enlightenment.

enlightened wisdom just as it is. This is the meaning of the principle that earthly desires are enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin teaches that the world of Buddhahood within us is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

When we believe in the Gohonzon, chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, and awaken to our true, noble selves, then the wisdom to live out our lives, the courage and confidence to face the challenges of adversity and overcome them, and the compassion to care for the welfare of others will well forth from within us.

The sufferings of birth and death are nirvana means that though we may be in a state of suffering caused by the painful realities of birth and death, when we believe in the Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we can manifest in our lives the tranquil life state of a Buddha's enlightenment (nirvana).

The principles of earthly desires are enlightenment and the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana teach us that when we base ourselves on faith in the Mystic Law, we can lead positive, proactive lives, transforming every problem and suffering we have into a cause for growth and happiness.

Relative Happiness and Absolute Happiness

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda (1900–58) taught that there are two kinds of happiness: relative happiness and absolute happiness. Relative happiness describes a condition in which our material needs are fulfilled and our personal desires satisfied. But desires know no limits; even if we may enjoy a sense of those desires being fulfilled for a time, it is not lasting. Since this kind of happiness is dependent on external circumstances, if those circumstances should change or disappear, then so will our happiness. Such happiness is called relative because it exists only in relation to external factors.

In contrast, absolute happiness is a state of life in which being alive itself is a source of happiness and

Absolute happiness is a state of life in which being alive itself is a source of happiness and joy no matter where we are or what our circumstances.



joy no matter where we are or what our circumstances. It describes a life condition in which happiness wells forth from within us. Because it is not influenced by external conditions, it is called absolute happiness. Attaining Buddhahood means establishing this state of absolute happiness.

Living amid the realities of this world, it is inevitable that we will meet with various problems and difficulties. But in the same way that someone who is strong and physically fit can easily climb a mountain, even when carrying a heavy load, those who have established an inner state of absolute happiness can use any challenge they encounter as an impetus for bringing forth powerful life force and calmly overcome adversity. For strong mountain climbers, the steeper and more demanding the ascent, the greater enjoyment they feel in overcoming each challenge on the path to the summit. Similarly, for those who through Buddhist practice have acquired the life force and wisdom to overcome hardships, the real world with all its troubles and challenges is a place for creating value rich in satisfaction and fulfillment.

In addition, while relative happiness, which depends on external factors, disappears with death, the absolute happiness of the life state of Buddhahood persists eternally. As the Daishonin says, “Passing through the round of births and deaths, one makes one’s way on the land of the Dharma nature, or enlightenment, that is inherent within oneself” (OTT, 52).

Those who have established an inner state of absolute happiness can use any challenge they encounter as an impetus for bringing forth powerful life force and calmly overcome adversity.

Review Questions

ATTAINING BUDDHAHOOD IN THIS LIFETIME

33. By embracing faith in the Gohonzon and striving sincerely in Buddhist practice for oneself and others, anyone can realize the state of Buddhahood in this present existence. What is this principle called? (See p. 21)

34. Nichiren explains the “attain” of attaining Buddhahood as follows: “‘Attain’ means to _____ or reveal” (OTT, 126). (See p. 22).

35. Nichiren Buddhism teaches that people can attain Buddhahood just as they are without having to be reborn or changing their present form as an ordinary person. What is this principle called? (See p. 22)

36. A life of earthly desires and suffering can become one of limitless freedom that shines with enlightened wisdom just as it is. What is this principle called? (See pp. 23–24)

37. “The sufferings of birth and death are nirvana” means that though we may be in a state of suffering caused by the painful realities of birth and death, when we believe in the _____ and chant _____, we can manifest the tranquil life state of a Buddha’s enlightenment (nirvana). (See p. 24)

38. _____ happiness exists only in relation to external factors. _____ happiness is a state of life in which being alive is a source of joy no matter our circumstances. (See p. 24)

Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land and Kosen-rufu

As guidelines for practice in order to secure happiness for oneself and others amid the realities of society, Nichiren Daishonin stressed the importance of establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land and kosen-rufu.

Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land

Nichiren Buddhism is a teaching that enables people to transform their life condition and develop a state of absolute happiness in the course of this lifetime. In addition, through such a profound inner transformation in each individual, it aims to achieve peace for society as a whole.

The Daishonin sets forth the principle for realizing peace in his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.”

“Establishing the correct teaching” means promoting faith in and acceptance of the correct teaching of Buddhism as the foundation for people’s lives and making the Buddhist teaching of respect for the dignity of life the fundamental motivating principle of society. “For the peace of the land” means realizing peace and prosperity in society as well as safety and security for all individuals in their daily lives.

In addition to indicating the nation as a political institution centering on the ruling authorities, “land” in “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” refers, on a deeper level, to the basis of people’s daily lives and sustenance. In that sense, it refers to not only the social structure formed by human beings but also the land itself—the natural environment.

The Daishonin’s belief that the people are the central presence in the land may perhaps also be discerned in his frequent usage in the original manuscript of “On Establishing the Correct Teaching

Nichiren Buddhism, through a profound inner transformation in each individual, aims to achieve peace for society as a whole.



The Daishonin wrote this treatise and remonstrated with the ruling authorities out of his wish to put an end to the sufferings of the people of his day.

for the Peace of the Land” of the Chinese character for “land” (also, “country” or “nation”) written with the element for “people” inside a rectangular enclosure, rather than the characters using the element for “king,” or that suggesting a military domain, inside a rectangular enclosure, which were more commonly used.

The Daishonin also wrote, “A king sees his people as his parents” (“Offerings in the Snow,” WND-2, 809), asserting that those in power should make the people their foundation. He further warned that rulers who “fail to heed or understand the afflictions of the populace” will fall into the evil paths (see “On the Protection of the Nation,” WND-2, 92).

While “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” was written to realize peace in Japan at that time, its underlying spirit is to achieve peace and security for the people and, further, to actualize peace for the entire world and happiness for all humanity into the distant future.

The Daishonin wrote this treatise and remonstrated with the ruling authorities out of his wish to put an end to the sufferings of the people of his day. He was showing through his own example that practitioners of Buddhism must not content themselves with a Buddhist practice that consists solely of praying for their own enlightenment. Rather, basing themselves on the principles and spirit of Buddhism, they must actively engage in seeking solutions to the problems and issues facing society.

In “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin wrote, “If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquility throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not?” (WND-1, 24).

The self-centered attitude exemplified by averting one’s gaze from society’s problems and withdrawing into a realm of religious faith alone is sternly repudiated in Mahayana Buddhism.

The Soka Gakkai today is engaged in efforts to resolve global issues through its activities in the areas of peace, culture, education, and human rights, based on the principles and ideals of Nichiren Buddhism. These efforts, too, directly accord with the principle and spirit of establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land articulated by the Daishonin.

Kosen-rufu

The aim of Buddhism is to share and spread the correct teaching that embodies the Buddha’s enlightenment and to guide all people toward attaining the life state of Buddhahood and actualizing peace and prosperity for all humanity.

For that reason, Shakyamuni Buddha states in the Lotus Sutra, “After I have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it [this teaching] abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa [the entire world] and never allow it to be cut off, nor must you allow [negative forces such as] evil devils, the devils’ people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas, kumbhanda demons, or others to seize the advantage!” (LSOC, 330).

This passage states that in the last five-hundred-year period—meaning

this present period of the Latter Day of the Law—the Mystic Law should be spread abroad widely throughout the entire world. “Spread abroad widely” here is a translation of the Chinese characters pronounced *kosen-rufu* in Japanese.

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha also entrusts the mission of widespread propagation, or *kosen-rufu*, in the Latter Day of the Law to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who as his disciples from the unimaginably remote past are bodhisattvas who have thoroughly forged themselves.

During the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, countless multitudes of such bodhisattvas emerge from the earth. Led by Bodhisattva Superior Practices, they vow to propagate the Mystic Law, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, after Shakyamuni’s passing.

Shakyamuni in turn predicts that after his death these Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear in this suffering-filled world and like the sun and the moon illuminate the darkness of people’s lives and lead them to enlightenment.

Kosen-rufu Is the Fundamental Spirit of Nichiren Daishonin

In exact accord with the aforementioned passage of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin strove to spread the great Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the evil age of the Latter Day while enduring numerous life-threatening persecutions.

The Daishonin touches upon the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, or *kosen-rufu*, as follows:

The ‘great vow’ refers to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]. (OTT, 82)



If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering. (“On Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” WND-1, 736)

When I, Nichiren, first took faith in the Lotus Sutra, I was like a single drop of water or a single particle of dust in all the country of Japan. But later, when two people, three people, ten people, and eventually a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, and a million people come to recite the Lotus Sutra [chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] and transmit it to others, then they will form a Mount Sumeru of perfect enlightenment, an ocean of great nirvana. Seek no other

path by which to attain Buddhahood! (“The Selection of the Time,” WND-1, 580)

From these passages we can clearly see that achieving *kosen-rufu*, the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law, is the fundamental spirit of the Nichiren Daishonin.

The Daishonin also repeatedly urged his followers to dedicate their lives to *kosen-rufu*, attain Buddhahood, and actualize the principle of establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.

The Soka Gakkai—Making Kosen-rufu a Reality

The Soka Gakkai is the harmonious gathering of Buddhist practitioners who have inherited and carry on the Daishonin’s spirit, spreading the Mystic Law just as he taught in his writings.

The Daishonin wrote, “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the

Earth” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” WND-1, 385). The Soka Gakkai, which has spread the Mystic Law in the same spirit as the Daishonin, is the organization of Bodhisattvas of the Earth fulfilling the mission of kosen-rufu.

Until the appearance of the Soka

Gakkai seven hundred years after the Daishonin’s death, no one had been able to widely spread the Mystic Law. It is the Soka Gakkai that has made the predictions of Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin a reality. This is proof that the Soka Gakkai is the organization that has

emerged to carry out the mission of kosen-rufu, acting in accord with the Buddha’s intent.

The Soka Gakkai is making kosen-rufu a reality, spreading the Mystic Law throughout the entire world, just as the Lotus Sutra teaches.

Review Questions

ESTABLISHING THE CORRECT TEACHING FOR THE PEACE OF THE LAND

39. What does “establishing the correct teaching” mean? (See p. 26)

40. What does “for the peace of the land” mean? (See p. 26)

41. Why did Nichiren write this treatise and utilize it to remonstrate with the ruling authorities? (See p. 27)

42. What is the translation of the Chinese characters pronounced *kosen-rufu* in Japanese? (See p. 28)

43. In the Lotus Sutra, to whom does the Buddha entrust the mission of widespread propagation in the Latter Day of the Law? (See p. 28)

44. Who is Bodhisattva Superior Practices? (See p. 28)

45. In exact accord with the Lotus Sutra, _____ strove to spread the great Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo in the evil age of the Latter Day while enduring numerous life-threatening persecutions. (See p. 28)

46. _____ is the harmonious gathering of Buddhist practitioners who have inherited and carried on the Daishonin’s spirit, spreading the Mystic Law just as he taught in his writings. (See p. 28)



The Ten Worlds

The Ten Worlds

This chapter will discuss the principle known as the Ten Worlds and clarify that the fundamental aim of faith in Nichiren Buddhism is to reveal in our lives the state of Buddhahood that is inherent within us.

The Six Paths

The Ten Worlds is a classification of ten distinct states of life and forms the foundation for the Buddhist view of life. Through examining the Ten Worlds, we can come to understand the nature of our own state of life and gain insights into how we can transform it.

The Ten Worlds are (1) the world of hell, (2) the world of hungry spirits [hunger], (3) the world of animals [animality], (4) the world of asuras, (5) the world of human beings [humanity], (6) the world of heavenly beings [heaven], (7) the world of voice-hearers [learning], (8) the world of cause-awakened ones [realization], (9) the world of bodhisattvas, and (10) the world of Buddhas.

The first six worlds—those of hell, hunger, animality, asuras, humanity, and heaven—are known as the six paths. The remaining four—those of learning, realization, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas—are known as the four noble worlds.

According to the ancient Indian worldview, the six paths refer to the six realms of existence among which life transmigrates in the unending cycle of birth and death. Buddhism

adopted this concept. The four noble worlds are life states that are attained through Buddhist practice.

In Buddhist sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, the Ten Worlds are regarded as ten separate, fixed realms of existence. The Lotus Sutra, however, fundamentally rejects that point of view, teaching that the Ten Worlds are ten states of life inherent within each living being. It reveals that living beings of the nine worlds from hell through bodhisattvas possess within them the world of Buddhahood and that Buddhahood also possesses all the other nine worlds.

Therefore, a being presently manifesting one of the Ten Worlds in fact possesses within itself all of the Ten Worlds and can subsequently manifest any other of the Ten Worlds in response to external influences. This teaching that all of the Ten Worlds are inherent within one another is called the “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.”

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside oneself; both lie only within one’s own heart. Awakened to this, one is called a Buddha; deluded about it, one is called an ordinary person” (“Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light,” WND-1, 456).

A single life possesses all the Ten Worlds. This means that even if right now we may be experiencing the painful life state of hell, we can transform it into the supremely joyous life state of Buddhahood. The principle of the Ten Worlds based on the Lotus Sutra opens the way for such dynamic inner transformation.

Let us now examine the nature of each of the Ten Worlds. First of all,

with regard to the lowest six worlds, or the six paths, the Daishonin writes in “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”:

When we look from time to time at a person’s face, we find him or her sometimes joyful, sometimes enraged, and sometimes calm. At times greed appears in the person’s face, at times foolishness, and at times perversity. Rage is the world of hell, greed is that of hungry spirits, foolishness is that of animals, perversity is that of asuras, joy is that of heaven, and calmness is that of human beings. (WND-1, 358)

Based on this passage, let us look at each of the six paths in turn.

The World of Hell

The Japanese word for hell, *jigoku* (Skt *naraka*), literally means underground prison. Buddhist scriptures describe many hells, such as the eight hot hells, the eight cold hells, and numerous others.

The world of hell is the lowest state of life, a state in which one is imprisoned by suffering and completely lacking in freedom.

The Daishonin writes, “Hell is a dreadful dwelling of fire” (“Letter to Niike,” WND-1, 1026). Hell is a life state in which we experience the world around us as a place that inflicts suffering upon us as intense as if we were being burned by flames.

In “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” the Daishonin says, “Rage is the world of hell.”

A single life possesses all the Ten Worlds. This means that even if right now we may be experiencing the painful life state of hell, we can transform it into the supremely joyous life state of Buddhahood.

This rage arises from bitter frustration and discontent with ourselves for not being or achieving what we desire, or toward the world around us that inflicts such suffering on us. It is the tormented expression of a life hopelessly trapped in a realm of suffering.

Hell is the state of being in which living is itself extremely painful and everything we see is colored by our unhappiness and misery.

The World of Hunger

The world of hungry spirits, or the life state of hunger, is characterized by relentless craving and the suffering arising from such craving going unsatisfied.

In ancient Indian mythology, hungry spirits (Skt *preta*) originally referred to the deceased or spirits of the dead, who were believed to be constantly starving. As a result, a life state where one is spiritually and physically tormented by intense, unremitting craving came to be known as the world of hungry spirits.

The Daishonin writes, “Greed is [the world] of hungry spirits” and “The realm of hungry spirits is a pitiful place where, driven by starvation, they devour their own children” (“Letter to Niike,” WND-1, 1026). Hunger so strong that it drives those in its grip to devour their own children describes a life state of suffering in which one’s heart and mind are ruled by insatiable desires.

Of course, wants and desires have both good and bad aspects. Human beings could not survive without the urge to eat. Desires can also be the motivating force for human progress and self-improvement. But

the life state of hunger is one of suffering in which one is enslaved by desires and unable to use them for constructive, creative purposes.

The World of Animality

The world of animals, or the life state of animality, is characterized by foolishness in the sense of being moved by impulse rather than reason and being concerned only with immediate benefit and gratification.

The Daishonin writes, “Foolishness is [the world] of animals” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358). This describes a life state of acting impulsively for short-term benefit with no understanding of the law of cause and effect and no ability to judge between right and wrong, good and evil.

The Daishonin also writes of the world of animality, “It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong” (“Letter to Niike,” WND-1, 1026) and “[The realm of] animals is to kill or be killed” (“Letter to Niike,” WND-1, 1026). He describes the life state of animality as one ruled by the law of the jungle, a struggle for survival in which one is willing to harm others to stay alive with no sense of reason or conscience. Because it is a condition of foolishness, in which one is fixated on immediate reward and cannot give thought to future consequences, those dominated by this life state are the engineers of their own suffering and self-destruction.

[Note: The use of the term *animals* is based on ancient Indian beliefs. Naturally, there are examples of animals, such as service dogs, that devotedly assist others, and it

is also true that some of the behavior of human beings—for example, wars and genocide—is often much crueler and more brutal than that of nonhuman animals.]

Because the worlds of hell, hunger, and animality all represent conditions of suffering, they are collectively known as the three evil paths.

The World of Asuras

Asuras are contentious demons found in ancient Indian mythology.

A characteristic of the world of asuras is an obsession with personal superiority or self-importance, a tendency to always compare oneself with others and want to be better than them.

When those in this life state encounter people they consider inferior to themselves, they become arrogant and look down on them. Even when they recognize that others are superior to them in some way, they are unable to respect them. And when they meet someone who is truly more powerful than they are, they become cowardly and fawning.

Those in the world of asuras often put on an appearance of being people of virtue and fine character, even pretending to be humble in order to impress others. Inside, however, they are filled with jealousy and resentment toward those they perceive to be better than them. This gap between outward appearance and inner reality leads to hypocrisy and self-deception, which are also characteristics of this life state.

This is why the Daishonin writes, “Perversity is [the world] of asuras” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358). Here, “perversity” means concealing one’s true feelings in order to ingratiate oneself with others. There are two aspects to this perversity—to fawn and deceive and to distort reason.

Unlike those in the three evil paths—the worlds of hell, hungry spirits, and animals—who are dominated by the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness,¹ those in the world of asuras act of their own volition. In this sense, the world of asuras can be considered a higher state than the three evil paths. Nevertheless, because it is essentially a realm filled with suffering, it is grouped together with the three evil paths to form the four evil paths.

The World of Humanity

The world of human beings, or the life state of humanity, is a calm, composed state in which people maintain their characteristic human qualities. The Daishonin says, “Calmness is [the world] of human beings” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358).

Those in the life state of humanity understand the principle of cause and effect and are rational enough to know the difference between good and evil.

The Daishonin writes, “The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals” (“The Three Kinds of Treasure,” WND-1, 852). Those in the life state of humanity have the capacity to distinguish right from wrong and to exercise self-control.

A characteristic of the world of asuras is an obsession with personal superiority or self-importance, a tendency to always compare oneself with others and want to be better than them.



John Simitopoulos / Unsplash

The life state of humanity cannot be sustained without effort. In the reality of society, which is filled with many negative influences, it is indeed difficult for people to live in a humane way. It is impossible without a constant effort at self-improvement and personal development. The world of humanity is the first step toward a life state of winning over oneself.

Those in the world of humanity are also seen as the correct vessel for attaining the noble paths.² While they are vulnerable to falling into the evil paths through negative influences, they also have the potential to advance to the four noble worlds, or enlightened states of life, through Buddhist practice.

The World of Heaven

In ancient Indian cosmology, heaven referred both to gods possessing supernatural powers and to the realm where they lived. In ancient India, it was believed that those who performed good acts in their present life would be reborn as deities in the heavenly realm.

In Buddhism, the world of heavenly beings, or the life state of heaven, is regarded as a condition of joy experienced when we fulfill our desires through effort. The Daishonin writes, “Joy is [the world] of heaven” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358).

There are all kinds of desires—instinctive desires such as for food and sleep, material desires for things like a new car or house, social desires such as the wish for status and honors, and intellectual and spiritual desires such as the aspiration to know about yet-to-be-discovered worlds or create new

works of art. The state of blissful joy one experiences upon fulfilling these various kinds of desires is the world of heaven.

But the joy of the world of heaven is not lasting. It fades and disappears with the passage of time. In that sense, the world of heavenly beings is not the state of genuine happiness that should be our ultimate aim.

The Four Noble Worlds

The worlds from hell to heavenly beings discussed above, together referred to as the six paths, are easily influenced by external circumstances.

When one's desires are fulfilled, one experiences the bliss of the world of heaven, and when one's external environment is calm and stable, one enjoys the tranquility of the world of humanity. But should those external conditions change, one can quickly tumble into states

of intense suffering, such as the worlds of hell and hunger.

In the sense that they are governed by external circumstances, the life states of the six paths are not truly free or autonomous.

The aim of Buddhist practice is to transcend the six paths and develop a self-determined state of happiness that is not controlled by external circumstances. The awakened states of life a person can develop through Buddhist practice are known as the four noble worlds—the worlds of learning, realization, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas.

The Worlds of Learning and Realization

Traditionally, the worlds of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones were life states attained through practicing the so-called Hinayana teachings.

People in these two worlds, which

are also known as the life states of learning and realization, are together referred to as the people of the two vehicles.

The world of learning is the life state attained by those who gain a partial awakening through hearing the Buddha's teaching.

The world of realization refers to the life state attained by those who gain a partial awakening through their own observations and effort. It is also called the realm of self-awakened ones.

The partial awakening of the people of the two vehicles is an awakening to the impermanence of all phenomena—the reality that all things are constantly changing, coming into and going out of existence. Those in the worlds of learning and realization, by objectively observing themselves and the world around them, perceive the truth that all things arise in response to causes and conditions, change with the passage of time, and eventually cease to exist. And they strive to overcome their attachment to transient things and phenomena.

There are times in our daily lives when we have a strong perception of the impermanence of all things, including ourselves. The Daishonin notes, "The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles are present in the human world?" ("The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," WND-1, 358). He is saying that the world of humanity also possesses these perceptive worlds of learning and realization.

Those who sought to attain the life states of the two vehicles identified the cause of suffering as attach-



ment to impermanent, transient things and phenomena, and they endeavored to eradicate such attachment and other earthly desires. Because of that, however, they strayed into the mistaken path of seeking to extinguish their own bodies and minds entirely (the teaching of reducing the body to ashes and annihilating consciousness).³

From the perspective of the enlightenment of the Buddha, the awakening gained by those in the worlds of learning and realization is imperfect and partial. But those in these worlds content themselves with this lesser degree of enlightenment and do not seek the full enlightenment of the Buddha. Though they acknowledge the superior enlightenment of the Buddha, their teacher, they do not think themselves able to attain it and remain at a lower level of enlightenment.

Additionally, those in the worlds of learning and realization are inclined to self-absorption, seeking only their own enlightenment and making no effort to help others do the same. This self-centeredness is the limitation of these two worlds.

The World of Bodhisattvas

The Sanskrit term *bodhisattva* means a living being (*sattva*) who strives continuously to attain the enlightenment (*bodhi*) of a Buddha. Although the people of the two vehicles accept the Buddha as their teacher, they do not believe themselves capable of attaining the same life state as the Buddha. In contrast, bodhisattvas not only regard the Buddha as their teacher, but they strive to obtain the same enlightened state. In addition, they also try to lead others to enlightenment by communicating and spreading the Buddha's teachings.

What distinguishes those of the world of bodhisattvas, or the life state of bodhisattva, is their seeking spirit to attain the highest life state of Buddhahood and their altruistic efforts to share the benefits they have obtained through Buddhist practice.

The bodhisattva spirit is to empathize with the pain and sorrow of others and work to relieve that suffering and impart joy out of a wish for the happiness of oneself and others.

Whereas the people of the two vehicles, focused solely on their own welfare, content themselves with a lesser awakening, those in the world of bodhisattvas act with a sense of mission for the sake of people and the Law.

The essence of the world of bodhisattvas is compassion. The Sanskrit term for compassion, *karuna* (Jpn *jishi*), is sometimes translated as “loving-kindness” or “mercy.” In “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” the Daishonin writes: “Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the bodhisattva world within him” (WND-1, 358). Just as even the most heartless villain still cares for his own wife and children, a spirit of compassion for others is inherent in all life. Those in the life state of bodhisattva direct this spirit of compassion to all people and make it the foundation for their lives.

The partial awakening of the people of the two vehicles is an awakening to the impermanence of all phenomena — the reality that all things are constantly changing, coming into and going out of existence.

The World of Buddhahood

The world of Buddhas, or the life state of Buddhahood, is the supremely noble life state manifested by a Buddha.

Buddha means awakened one—one who has awakened to the Mystic Law, the fundamental Law that pervades the entire universe and all life. Specifically, it refers to Shakyamuni, who lived in India. The Buddhist sutras describe various other Buddhas such as Amida Buddha, but these are all fictitious beings symbolizing an aspect of the greatness of the enlightened life state of Buddhahood.

Nichiren Daishonin is the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law who as an ordinary human being revealed the infinitely respectable life state of Buddhahood in his own life and established the path by which all people can attain enlightenment.

Buddhahood is an expansive life state overflowing with good fortune and benefit attained through awakening to the fact that the Mystic Law is the foundation of one's being. Having attained this state of life, a Buddha is able to manifest unsurpassed wisdom and compassion, employing them unceasingly to enable all people to attain the same life state of enlightenment that he enjoys.

The life state of Buddhahood is originally inherent in our own beings. It is difficult to manifest it, however, in our daily lives, which are filled with unending problems and challenges. For this reason, the Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon, or object of devotion, as a means for all people to bring forth from within them the life state of Buddhahood. The Gohonzon embodies

the enlightened life state of Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, the essence of which is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

When we believe in the Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo for the happiness of ourselves and others, we can tap the life state of Buddhahood within us.

In the “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” the Daishonin identifies the profound connection between the life state of Buddhahood and faith in the Mystic Law, saying, “That ordinary people born in the latter age can believe in the Lotus Sutra is due to the fact that the world of Buddhahood is present in the human world” (WND-1, 358).

The Lotus Sutra reveals that all people are inherently Buddhas; we human beings can believe in that teaching precisely because our lives fundamentally possess the state of

Buddhahood.

Nichikan wrote, “Strong faith in the Lotus Sutra is called the world of Buddhahood.”⁵ “Lotus Sutra” here means the Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo—the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law. Therefore, having strong faith to base our lives on the Gohonzon is nothing other than the life state of Buddhahood.

This life state of Buddhahood attained through faith in the Mystic Law can be described in contemporary terms as a state of absolute happiness that nothing can destroy. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda described it as a state of life in which being alive is itself happiness.

The life state of Buddhahood is also often likened to the spirit of a lion king—a state of complete ease and confidence in which, like the lion king, one fears nothing.



Joanthan Wilson

? Review Questions

THE TEN WORLDS

47. What are the Ten Worlds as taught in the Lotus Sutra? (See p. 30)

48. Those of the nine worlds from hell through bodhisattvas possess the world of Buddhahood, and Buddhahood also exists in all nine worlds. What is this principle called? (See p. 31)

49. Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside oneself; both lie only within one’s own heart. Awakened to this, one is called a _____; deluded about it, one is called an _____” (“Hell is the Land of Tranquil Light,” WND-1, 456). (See p. 31)

50. What worlds make up the three evil paths? (See p. 33)

51. Which world is characterized by an obsession with personal superiority and a tendency to constantly compare oneself with others? (See p. 33)

52. Concerning the Ten Worlds, what is the aim of Buddhist practice? (See p. 35)

53. From the perspective of the Buddha’s enlightenment, the awakening gained by those in the worlds of _____ and _____ are imperfect and partial, because they content themselves with a lesser degree of enlightenment than the Buddha and tend to seek only their own enlightenment, making no effort to help others do the same. (See p. 36)

54. What distinguishes the world of bodhisattvas? (See p. 36)

55. Nichiren writes: “That ordinary people born in the latter age can believe in the Lotus Sutra is due to the fact that the world of _____ is present in the human world” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358). (See p. 37)

56. The life state of _____ attained through faith in the Mystic Law can be described in contemporary terms as a state of absolute happiness that nothing can destroy. (See p. 37)



Brief Soka Gakkai History

Seikyo Press

Afterword to *The New Human Revolution*

A new chapter of history has opened. The sun of Nichiren Buddhism has risen brightly in the skies of the twenty-first century, and the banner of Soka humanism waves in 192 countries and territories around the globe.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Can there be any doubt that . . . [the Law] will be spread far and wide [Jpn *kosen-rufu*] throughout . . . Jambudvipa [the entire world]?”

(“The Selection of the Time,” WND-1, 550). The Soka Gakkai has made these words of the Daishonin a reality, creating a great eternal river of worldwide *kosen-rufu* that will nourish and enrich the ten thousand years and more of the Latter Day of the Law. *The Human Revolution* (twelve volumes) and its sequel *The New Human Revolution* (thirty volumes), which describe the vow for *kosen-rufu* and the process of building peace, have reached their conclusion with the publication of this [thirtieth and] final volume.

Fifty-four years have passed since I began writing *The Human Revolution* on December 2, 1964, and twenty-five years since I started writing *The New Human Revolution* [on August 6, 1993]. I am sure my

mentor, Josei Toda, is smiling and nodding in approval at the completion of this “day-to-day record” (“The Unanimous Declaration by the Buddhas,” WND-2, 843), or chronicle, of the Soka Gakkai’s efforts for kosen-rufu that his disciple poured his heart and energy into writing.

The Human Revolution begins just a short time before Japan’s defeat in World War II, on July 3, 1945—the day that Toda, who had been incarcerated by the country’s militarist authorities, was released from prison. Inheriting the legacy of his mentor—first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who had fought against government persecution and died in prison for his beliefs—Toda set about rebuilding the Soka Gakkai, which was in a state of virtual collapse, and eventually took the lead as its second president. The novel goes on to describe how Toda, joined by his disciple Shin’ichi Yamamoto, achieved his lifelong goal of increasing the Soka Gakkai’s membership to 750,000 households and laid the foundations for kosen-rufu in Japan, before his death on April 2, 1958. It concludes with the inauguration of his successor, Shin’ichi, as the third Soka Gakkai president.

I decided to write *The Human Revolution* as a biographical novel about Mr. Toda to present the truth about my mentor, who bore the brunt of the public’s misunderstanding and criticisms of the Soka Gakkai, and to let the world know about his life and achievements. I also wanted to record for posterity the true history of the Soka Gakkai spirit and the path of genuine faith.

The Human Revolution began pub-

lication in serial form in the New Year’s Day issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun* in 1965. After the appearance of the final installment on February 11, 1993, I received requests from many of our members to write a sequel.

The true greatness of the mentor is demonstrated by the lives and achievements of the disciples. In addition, to communicate Mr. Toda’s spirit to future generations, I knew I would have to chronicle the path taken by the disciples who carried on his legacy. The *Seikyo Shimbun* also expressed a strong desire for me to write a sequel, so, regarding this as my mission, I agreed.

• • •

I began writing *The New Human Revolution* on August 6, 1993, at the Nagano Training Center. Karuizawa, where the center is located, is a profoundly memorable place for me, for I spent my last summer with Mr. Toda there in August 1957, and it was during that stay that I vowed in my heart to write a novel about Mr. Toda’s life. That August 6 also marked forty-eight years since the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, the first use of nuclear weapons in history. This was the place and time I decided to begin writing *The New Human Revolution*.

I started writing my earlier novel, *The Human Revolution*, on December 2, 1964, in Okinawa, which had been the site of brutal ground fighting during World War II. I opened that novel with the words: “Nothing is more barbarous than war. Nothing is more cruel.”

In *The New Human Revolution*, I began with the words: “Nothing is more precious than peace. Nothing

brings more happiness. Peace is the most basic starting point for the advancement of humankind.”

The aim of worldwide kosen-rufu is the realization of peace and happiness for all humanity. In these opening lines of my two novels, I wanted to leave an eternal record of my vow as a disciple to carry on the spirit and ideals of the first two Soka Gakkai presidents and change the direction of history from an age of war to an age of peace.

I was sixty-five years old when I began *The New Human Revolution*, planning on completing it in thirty volumes. I knew it would entail having to write amid my travels not only in Japan but also to countries all over the globe. I undertook the task, fully recognizing that it would be an intense and unremitting struggle to complete it within my lifetime.

Serialization of the novel in the *Seikyo Shimbun* began on November 18, 1993.

Each day was a battle into which I poured my heart and soul. Calling to mind my precious fellow members in Japan and around the world striving so earnestly in faith, I tapped the deepest recesses of my being to write my tale, as if I were sending a letter of encouragement to each one of them. At the same time, I was also engaging in an inner dialogue with my mentor as I wrote. His voice would echo in my mind, urging me to transmit the Soka Gakkai spirit for posterity and fulfill my mission in this life. That would sweep away all weariness and fill me with courage.

I completed “Vow,” the sixth and final chapter of volume thirty, on August 6, 2018, exactly twenty-five years after I had first begun the novel, and at the very same place, the Nagano Training Center. When I embarked on this chapter, I had already decided that I would aim for the final installment to be published in the *Seikyo Shimbun* on September 8, the anniversary of the day Mr. Toda made his Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons in 1957—because this day marks the starting point of the Soka Gakkai’s peace activities. To actualize my mentor’s wish for peace, I traveled around the world and worked with our members to create a growing tide of Soka humanism. I therefore felt that this was the only possible

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day to bring this story of Mr. Toda's successors to its close.

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The New Human Revolution begins with Shin'ichi's departure on his first overseas journey on October 2, 1960, five months after his inauguration as third Soka Gakkai president on May 3. It describes his efforts in Japan to construct a castle of kosen-rufu embodying the victory of the people and also his travels to fifty-four countries and territories, sowing the seeds of peace of the Mystic Law and building countless bridges of educational and cultural exchange. It continues up to November 2001, the year marking the start of the new century, a grand milestone toward which the Soka Gakkai had long worked.

In the course of those decades, the Cold War between East and West came to an end, and the Soviet Union, one of the main players in that conflict, collapsed. During the Cold War, in search of a way to unite humanity, Shin'ichi engaged in dialogues with many leading world thinkers, not least the historian Arnold J. Toynbee. At a moment of heightened tensions between the Soviet Union and China, he made repeated visits to both countries, meeting with Soviet premier Aleksey Kosygin and Chinese premier Zhou Enlai. He traveled to the United States, where he met and spoke with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger.

Later, he also met and spoke frequently with Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, with whom he developed a warm friendship.

Nichiren Buddhism teaches that all people possess the Buddha nature. It is a profound teaching that affirms the dignity and preciousness of life and the fundamental equality of all human beings. Its spirit of universal compassion offers a model of human behavior. Nichiren Buddhism is a great philosophy that can transform suspicion into trust, hatred into friendship; eliminate war and conflict; and realize lasting peace. Shin'ichi's travels for peace were an endeavor to make its humanistic principles and ideals the spirit of the age and bring the world together.

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A major catalyst for the dynamic development of the Soka Gakkai,

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which was energetically advancing worldwide kosen-rufu, was its attainment of spiritual independence from the corrupt and ossified Nichiren Shoshu priesthood.

The Soka Gakkai had stoically endured the terrible treatment by priests who were openly contemptuous of believers. It had sought to maintain harmonious relations between the priesthood and the laity and continued to sincerely support Nichiren Shoshu. All of this had been solely for the sake of advancing kosen-rufu, the cherished wish of Nichiren Daishonin. But priests of Nichiren Shoshu became increasingly dogmatic and flaunted their clerical authority. In the process, they even came to reject as slander of the Law the artistic and cultural works that were inspired by other faith traditions yet were considered by people around the world as the heritage of all humanity. Growing ever more authoritarian, they adopted an unjust policy of extreme discrimination against the laity and sought to establish a system in which lay followers were completely subjugated by the priesthood, with the high priest at its zenith. This was a betrayal of the Daishonin's spirit and a violation of the Buddhist teachings of respect for the dignity of life and the equality of all people.

If this were to continue, the fundamental principles of Nichiren Buddhism would be distorted in a way that it no longer resembled a teaching for realizing happiness and peace for all humanity. With the rallying cry of "Return to the spirit of the Daishonin!" the Soka Gakkai rose up to carry out a religious reformation and remonstrated with the priesthood. Nichiren Shoshu's

response to the Soka Gakkai, the organization striving for kosen-rufu in exact accord with the Daishonin's intent, was to issue a call for it to disband, followed soon after by a notice of excommunication.

November 28, 1991, the day Nichiren Shoshu sent that final notice, became the Soka Gakkai's Spiritual Independence Day, marking its liberation from the fetters of the priesthood. The dark clouds hanging over the Soka Gakkai's future were swept away and the path to worldwide kosen-rufu suddenly opened wide before us. It was the dawn of a new day when the Soka Gakkai would soar freely into the twenty-first century as a truly global religious movement.

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The main theme of both *The Human Revolution* and *The New Human Revolution* is "A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind."

How, then, do we actually go about changing our destiny or karma?

The profound awakening that Josei Toda experienced while in prison holds the answer to this question. Wishing to grasp the truth of the Lotus Sutra, he carefully read its passages again and again and chanted Nam-myoho-enge-kyo each day in his prison cell. In the course of doing so, he eventually awakened to the fact that he had been present along with Nichiren Daishonin at the Ceremony in the Air depicted in the Lotus Sutra and was a Bodhisattva of the Earth entrusted

with propagating the Law in the Latter Day. With inexpressible joy at this realization, he vowed to dedicate his life to kosen-rufu.

The Daishonin writes: “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” WND-1, 385). As this indicates, we, who devote ourselves to kosen-rufu just as the Daishonin teaches, are irrefutably Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Why is it, then, that we—noble bodhisattvas tasked with the solemn undertaking of kosen-rufu—have been born with karma that causes us various kinds of suffering?

“Teacher of the Law,” the Lotus Sutra’s tenth chapter, states, “These people voluntarily relinquish the reward due them for their pure deeds and, in the time after I have passed into extinction, because they pity living beings, they are born in this evil world so they may broadly expound this sutra” (*The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Suttas*, p. 200). The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China identifies this passage as articulating the principle of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma.”

Just as this principle explains, we have chosen, in accord with our vow as bodhisattvas, to be born into the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law with all sorts of destinies, or karma—illness, financial hardship, family discord, loneliness, low self-esteem, and the list goes on—to help guide others to enlightenment. But by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, striving in our Buddhist practice for ourselves and others, and dedicating our lives to kosen-rufu, our vibrant life force as Bodhisattvas of the Earth and the expansive life state of Buddhahood well forth within us. Our lives will brim with the wisdom, courage, strength, hope, and joy to overcome every hardship and daunting obstacle that arises. As we bravely triumph over the onslaughts of karma, we demonstrate the validity of the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism and the tremendous benefit of our Buddhist practice, and we further advance kosen-rufu. In fact, we have willingly taken on these hardships and sufferings in order to do just that.

Karma and mission are two sides of the same coin, and our karma directly becomes our unique and noble mission. That is why, when we dedicate our lives to kosen-rufu, there is no destiny that we cannot change.



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We are all Bodhisattvas of the Earth and have a right to become happy. We are the lead players and stars in a glorious drama performed on the grand stage of life—a drama of changing the icy winds of winter into the warm sunshine of spring, transforming suffering into joy.

The New Human Revolution unfolds as a story of changing karma or destiny into mission. The quintessential teaching of Nichiren Buddhism does not view life and its phenomena as fixed or static but elucidates life's dynamism, in which everything is changing and open to change, as is seen in such principles as earthly desires are enlightenment, the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana, and changing poison into medicine. It also perceives the potential for Buddhahood in the depths of the life of each suffering human being and teaches the way to awaken and manifest that life state—in other words, the supreme positive potential, creativity, and autonomy of human beings. This process of changing our lives, or inner transformation, we call human revolution.

Human beings are the builders and shapers of the societies, nations, and the world in which they live. Hatred and trust, disdain and respect, war and peace—all are the products of the human heart and mind. As a result, without human revolution, there can be no true personal happiness, social prosperity, or lasting world peace. Without this crucial element, any attempts to effect enduring change will be in vain. The philosophy of human revolution based on the principles of Nichiren Buddhism is certain to become a new guide for humanity as we set forth into this third mil-

lennium.

The Russian writer Leo Tolstoy observed to the effect that an immortal spirit likewise requires immortal. It is my sincere hope that Soka Gakkai members will make the completion of *The New Human Revolution* a fresh starting point and stand up as “Shin’ichi Yamamoto” to work for the happiness of others. I pray that, through their tireless, tenacious efforts, they will create their own brilliant history of human revolution.

As long as suffering and misery exist anywhere on our planet, we must continue to weave with rich color and bold creativity the magnificent tapestry of human victory that is kosen-rufu. That is why our mentor-disciple journey to realize the great vow for kosen-rufu will continue forever.

In closing, I would like to thank the late Kai Higashiyama, whose painting is featured on the cover of each of the thirty volumes of [the Japanese edition of] *The New Human Revolution*; Ken’ichiro Uchida, who created the illustrations for the novel’s serialized installments for twenty-five years; the editors and publishers of the *Seikyo Shimbun*; all those who have assisted in the process; and especially all of you, my readers.

Daisaku Ikeda
September 8, 2018

On the conclusion of the serialization of The New Human Revolution in the Seikyo Shimbun, at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters complex, Shinanomachi, Tokyo.

? Review Questions

BRIEF SOKA GAKKAI HISTORY

57. What was Ikeda Sensei's motivation in writing *The Human Revolution*? (See p. 40)

58. Why did Sensei write the thirty-volume novel *The New Human Revolution*? (See p. 41)

59. What motivated Sensei to hold dialogues with many leading world thinkers during the Cold War and to travel throughout the world? (See p. 42)

60. How did the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood betray the Daishonin's spirit? (See p. 43)

61. Why is November 28, 1991, considered the Soka Gakkai's Day of Spiritual Independence? (See p. 43)

62. What is the central theme of both *The Human Revolution* and *The New Human Revolution*? (See p. 43)

63. What profound awakening did Josei Toda have while in prison, opening the way for us to transform our destiny? (See pp. 43-44)

64. The Lotus Sutra's tenth chapter, "Teacher of the Law," states: "These people voluntarily relinquish the reward due them for their pure deeds and, in the time after I have passed into extinction, because they pity living beings, they are born in this evil world so they may broadly expound this sutra" (LSOC, 200). What Buddhist principle does this passage describe? (See p. 44)

65. What does the concept of "voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma" explain? (See p. 44)

Notes

Learning From Nichiren Daishonin's Writings

1. Daisaku Ikeda, *The Hope-Filled Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin* (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2009), 107.
2. Daisaku Ikeda, *Living the Gosho* (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2014), 25.
3. Daisaku Ikeda, *The Teachings for Victory*, vol. 7 (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2022), 33–34.
4. Daisaku Ikeda, *The Teachings for Victory*, vol. 5 (Santa Monica, CA: World Tribune Press, 2019), 61–62.

Nichiren Daishonin's Life and Teachings

1. Here, February 16, 1222, indicates the sixteenth day of the second month of 1222 on the lunar calendar, which was used for the purpose of recording dates during premodern times through the 1800s in countries such as Japan and China. The same approach is followed for other premodern dates that appear throughout the text.
2. The Latter Day of the Law refers to the age when the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha lose their power to lead people to enlightenment. It was generally regarded to mean the period starting two thousand years after the Buddha's passing. In Japan, it was believed that this age

began in the year 1052.

3. The three calamities and seven disasters are described in various sutras and differ slightly depending on the source. The three calamities include high grain prices or inflation (especially that caused by famine), warfare, and pestilence. The seven disasters include natural disasters such as extraordinary changes of the stars and planets and unseasonable storms.
4. The three bodies of a Buddha refer to the Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body. The Dharma body is the fundamental truth, or Law, to which a Buddha is enlightened. The reward body is the wisdom to perceive the Law. And the manifested body is the compassionate actions a Buddha carries out to lead people to happiness.
5. Nichikan (1665–1726) was a scholar priest who lived during the Edo period (1603–1868) of Japan. He systematized and placed fresh emphasis on the Buddhist principles of Nichiren Daishonin as inherited and transmitted by his direct disciple and successor, Nikko Shonin.

The Ten Worlds

1. Three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness: The fundamental evils inherent in life that give rise to human suffering. In *The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, often attributed to the renowned Mahayana doctrinal master Nagarjuna, the three poisons are regarded as the source of all illusions and

earthly desires. The three poisons are so called because they pollute people's lives and work to prevent them from turning their hearts and minds to goodness.

2. Correct vessel for attaining the noble paths: A passage found in *The Treatise on the Rise of the World* stating that human beings represent the most appropriate vessel, or form of life, for attaining the Buddha way.
3. Reducing the body to ashes and annihilating consciousness: A reference to the Hinayana doctrine asserting that one can attain nirvana, escaping from the sufferings of endless cycle of birth and death, only upon extinguishing one's body and mind, which are deemed to be the sources of earthly desires, illusions, and sufferings.
4. Translated from Japanese. Nichikan, "Sanju hidden sho" [The threefold secret teaching], *Rokkan-sho* [The six-volume writings] (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1960)

Brief Soka Gakkai History

1. Translated from Russian. L. N. Tolstoy, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v 90 tomakh* [Complete works in 90 volumes], vol. 45 (Moscow: TERRA, 1992), 46.