

BUDDHISM

A PHILOSOPHY
FOR
LIVING



AN INTRODUCTION TO
NICHIREN BUDDHISM AND
THE SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL

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SGI CANADA

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PREFACE

This booklet is intended to give a brief overview of Nichiren Buddhism, the Soka Gakkai International and SGI Canada, and to present some of the main concepts of Buddhism and how they can be applied to daily life and global society.

Although Buddhism is one of the world's great religions, it is often referred to as a "philosophy" or "life-philosophy." In other words, Buddhism is a philosophy for living—not a dogmatic set of beliefs or rules; it is a journey of inquiry into life and ultimate self-discovery. Nichiren Buddhism also offers an effective way to transform society toward peace, through the process of transforming the individual first. This process is called "human revolution."

The practice of Buddhism provides the vehicle for this journey, while the teachings provide the map. The destination is the development and fulfillment of our humanity, for this is what "Buddha" means. A Buddha is not a transcendental being who floats above the world and its problems. Instead, to be a Buddha means to be a fully developed human being who is totally engaged with the world, sharing its problems and struggling together with others to overcome the negative forces that lead us into suffering. A Buddha is a human being in the deepest sense of the word; and the individuals regarded as Buddhas, such as Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin, exemplified this in the way they lived their lives.

The Lotus Sutra, the most profound of Shakyamuni's teachings, reveals that every person is originally a Buddha, able to feel eternally at one with the universe, and experiencing limitless joy and wisdom. The reason we continue to suffer is that our true nature has been trapped in delusions and fears. When these delusions and fears are conquered, our enlightened nature is free to emerge. The central teaching of Nichiren Daishonin is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the essential core of the Lotus Sutra contained in its title. Practising Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the way to directly access our enlightened Buddha nature.

Many people in our society feel they are not even worthy of happiness. How sad this is, and how untrue! Every person deserves happiness. It is our original state and therefore our birthright. It is the compassionate will of the universe itself—toward joy, harmony and a celebration of life in all its diversity.

Altruism is the hallmark of Buddhism. But in order to effectively help others we must be able to solve our own problems. Therefore, the philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin teaches us how to overcome our own sufferings, and how to use our problems as stepping-stones for our development. As we heal the pain in our own lives and reveal our potential, our capacity to help others also expands. This in turn extends the scope and purpose of our existence. We can on this basis cultivate a spirit of genuine compassion, one that is rooted in sharing spiritual wealth and joy.

Buddhism is based on the principle that when we light the way for another, we light our own way at the same time.

Once we begin to reveal the condition of enlightenment we all possess, life itself becomes the greatest of all joys, and difficulties appear as challenges that make living even more exciting. Even death becomes comprehensible and, when it comes, it is experienced as a natural passage from this life to the next, in an eternally unfolding drama that continuously expands and deepens. When this approach to life spreads to others, it has profound implications for new directions for society and the world. The dream of peace begins with the individual, and expands from there. This is the spirit of Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI. I hope this booklet will give you a sense of this spirit.

I would like to thank all the people who worked on this project, and to especially thank SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, whose tireless efforts and leadership have made this wonderful philosophy known and understood throughout the world.

Tony Meers
SGI Canada



The only mythology that is valid today is the mythology of the planet—and we [the Western world] don't have such a mythology. The closest thing I know to a planetary mythology is Buddhism, which sees all beings as Buddha beings. The only problem is to come to the recognition of that...The task is only to know what is, and then to act in relation to the brotherhood of all these beings.

– Joseph Campbell, *The Power of Myth*

1. BUDDHISM: THE ADVENTURE OF BEING ALIVE

If the doors of perception were cleansed, men would see everything as it is, infinite.

~William Blake

From the dawn of our existence, humans have sought the meaning of life on this planet. We instinctively feel that life must have a purpose; and our observations of the undeniable intelligence and exquisite order of the universe confirm this belief—even though that purpose seems to elude us. Religion, philosophy, art and science have all sought the answers to the central question of existence from their various perspectives.

The person known to the world as the Buddha, who is commonly called Gautama or Shakyamuni, discovered the answers to the questions of life and death within his own consciousness. He was motivated in his quest by the one problem that has confounded philosophers throughout history: the problem of human suffering. He recognized that everything that exists must endure the four universal sufferings of birth, illness, aging and death.

The Buddha was a human being, not a deity or a superhuman figure. He felt the sufferings of his fellow humans like a dagger in his own heart—the pain of unfulfilled longings, the relentless onslaughts of illness and poverty, the grief of parting with loved ones, and the fear that is the most primal of all fears—the fear of life's end. He knew, too, the dread of feeling alone in a vast and apparently indifferent universe.

Realizing that every one of us must face these sufferings, the young Prince Siddhartha (as Shakyamuni was known in his youth), living some 2,500 years ago, resolved to search for the ultimate reality in the depths of his own existence. At the age of 19, he left the princely life that separated him from the harsh realities outside his gated existence. He journeyed far and wide in his quest to understand the inescapable sufferings of human existence and the means by which they could be overcome. After pursuing various ascetic practices and bringing himself to the verge of starvation, Shakyamuni still had not acquired the awakening he sought. He took some food to regain his strength, then sat down beneath a pipal tree and entered into deep meditation, resolved to stay there until he had attained enlightenment.

Sources vary as to how long he sat in meditation, but finally he attained the state of enlightenment, or Buddhahood, experiencing absolute oneness with the universe and revealing in the depths of his being a fount of infinite wisdom and compassion. After a long and arduous voyage of the spirit, he found pulsating within his own heart the eternal creative force that gives rise to life itself.

Having attained this state of life, Shakyamuni realized that he now had an obligation to teach others how they might



also reach enlightenment. Thus began a lifelong journey devoted to relieving the sufferings of others by teaching them what became known as the way of the Buddha. His life became what the late religious scholar Joseph Campbell called “the adventure of the hero—the adventure of being alive.”

For some 50 years, Shakyamuni taught people the wisdom he had discovered. These teachings were recorded by his disciples and organized into a collection of sutras. His greatest achievement was the revelation that the condition of life he experienced is the essential and original identity of humanity. Furthermore, it is the original identity of all life, from sub-atomic existence to the infinite cosmos. Everything that exists throughout time and space is one everlasting whole: alive, united and indivisible. Experiencing this whole as a participant in its grandeur, in contrast to feeling insignificant in its vastness, gives everything infinite meaning and value. In describing the life state of his mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, Daisaku Ikeda said that the universe was his own backyard. This state of life lies within each of us, waiting to be awakened.

The Buddha’s intent was not to sever our connection with life, but rather for us to embrace life and experience it to the fullest, in this lifetime and all future lives. The opposing

forces of darkness and light, inherent in all things, are forces we have the power to master. Both suffering and joy are inescapable aspects of life; but when we pursue life’s intrinsic wisdom and compassion, we gain the power to conquer suffering and generate the profound joy of living without fear. The way of Buddhism is to overcome the forces of darkness and open the floodgates of light.

Buddhism, from beginning to end, is the adventure of living and the quest for fulfillment—the fulfillment of our individual lives and the fulfillment of the promise of our species.

Who is a Buddha?

To many, the image conjured up by the word “Buddha” is that of an otherworldly being, remote from the matters of this world. Through meditation, the Buddha attained the state of “nirvana,” which is often thought to mean a transcendental existence that is achieved through the extinction of all desires (desires being the root cause of suffering). Such is the image portrayed in literature that bases its sources on the teachings that preceded the Lotus Sutra.

However, this image does not reflect the truth about the life of Shakyamuni. He was a deeply compassionate man who rejected the extremes of both asceticism and attachment.

He spent his life constantly interacting with others in his desire for all people to share the truth he had discovered.

The common understanding of the word Buddha is “enlightened one.” Enlightenment is a fully awakened state of vast wisdom through which reality in all its complexity can be fully understood and enjoyed. A human being who is fully awakened to the fundamental truth about life is called a Buddha.

However, many schools of Buddhism have taught that enlightenment is only accessible after an arduous process undertaken over unimaginably long periods of time—over many lifetimes, in fact. In dramatic contrast, what is considered Shakyamuni’s highest teaching, the Lotus Sutra, explains that Buddhahood is already present in all forms of life—not as a mystical or spiritual “ingredient,” but as the true entity of life itself. The Lotus Sutra teaches human equality and emphasizes that even within the life of a person apparently dominated by evil, there exists the unpolished jewel of the Buddha nature. No one else can bestow enlightenment on us; each of us must achieve it for ourselves.

Once we realize our Buddha nature exists, we need only awaken and develop or “polish” it. In Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, this is done through devotion to the “law of life” contained in the Lotus Sutra. This law of life is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the method by which we call forth the life force and wisdom of the Buddha nature from within ourselves.

Buddhahood is not a static condition or a state in which one can rest complacently. It is a dynamic experience and a journey of continual development and discovery.

When we continually manifest the Buddhahood in our lives, we come to be ruled less and less by selfishness (or greed), anger and foolishness—what Buddhism terms the “three poisons,” the causes of delusion and suffering. As we fuse our lives with the enlightened life of the Buddha, we can tap the potential within and change ourselves in a fundamental way.

As this inner state of Buddhahood is

strengthened, we also develop inner fortitude, which enables us to ride out even the wildest storms. If we are enlightened to the true, unchanging nature of life, we can joyfully surf the waves of difficulty that rise up before us in life, creating something of value out of any situation.

In this way, our “true self” blossoms, and we discover vast reserves of courage, compassion, wisdom and life force inside of us. We find ourselves becoming more energetic, more clear-minded and calm, and generally more positive, while also experiencing a feeling of deep inner freedom. As we experience a growing sense of oneness with the universe, the isolation and alienation that cause so much suffering begin to evaporate, and this process expands as our practice progresses. We lessen our attachment to our smaller egotistical self, which sees others as separate from ourselves, and become increasingly aware of the interconnectedness of all life. Gradually, we find our lives opening up to others, desiring their happiness as much as our own.

However, while it is easy to believe that we all possess the lower life-states outlined in Buddhist teachings, believing that we possess Buddhahood is much more difficult. But the value of struggling to develop and constantly strengthen this state within our lives becomes evident as our practice grows. In the words of Daisaku Ikeda,

[Buddhahood] is the joy of joys. Birth, old age, illness and death are no longer suffering, but part of the joy of living. The light of wisdom illuminates the entire universe, casting back the innate darkness of life. The life-space of the Buddha becomes united and fused with the universe. The self becomes the cosmos, and in a single instant the life-flow stretches out to encompass all that is past and all that is future. In each moment of the present, the eternal life force of the cosmos pours forth as a gigantic fountain of energy.



Nothing is as full of mystery as human life. Nothing is as respectable. Ordinary people, just as they are, can become Buddhas. While remaining ordinary persons, we can establish a state of happiness and total satisfaction arising from the very depths of our lives, the state of life of the Buddha.

– Daisaku Ikeda, Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra

2. THE LOTUS SUTRA AND THE ESSENTIAL TEACHING

Shakyamuni led his followers by gradual steps through his 50 years of teaching, starting with rudimentary principles and disciplines aimed at enabling his disciples to eventually understand his ultimate intent. The early sutras contain many commandments for monastic practice. These teachings also posit a view of enlightenment, or nirvana, as the extinction of earthly desires, which he identified as the source of human suffering. Such teachings were in keeping with many of the prevalent views of his day. “Annihilation of the self” meant that people could achieve nirvana only at the point of death, since ridding oneself of all desires ultimately meant giving up the desire for life itself. This posed a great contradiction for the Buddha’s disciples, since they saw before them in their teacher a living, breathing person who ate and slept as they themselves did.

At a point during the last eight years of his life, Shakyamuni took a radical turn in his teaching. He declared that his previous teachings had been intended as expedient means by which he had been preparing his disciples for the ultimate truth. He asked his disciples to “honestly discard” these earlier teachings. At the same time, he revealed the

universal Buddha nature, explaining the true meaning of nirvana as the manifestation of this Buddha nature in the context of everyday life. He provided with his own life an example of an enlightened person who loved and embraced all living beings as the answer to the question that had perplexed them for so long.

The teaching that Shakyamuni expounded in those last eight years came to be known as the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra is unique among the teachings of Shakyamuni in its assertion that enlightenment is possible for all people, without distinctions of any kind. The revelation of the universal accessibility of enlightenment it teaches distinguishes the Lotus Sutra as a powerful, life-affirming, democratic and humanistic teaching.

However, not all of Shakyamuni’s disciples were able to comprehend the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Following Shakyamuni’s passing, various schools of Buddhism spread throughout Asia. Since he had employed a wide variety of means by which to transmit his enlightenment to people of various capacities and circumstances over the course of his 50 years of teaching, it was inevitable that a broad range of interpretative schools should have emerged.



Nichiren Daishonin, who appeared some 2,000 years after Shakyamuni and established the essence of the Lotus Sutra, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, explains,

The most important thing in practising the Buddhist teachings is to follow and uphold the Buddha's golden words, not the opinions of others. Our teacher, the Thus Come One Shakyamuni, wished to reveal the Lotus Sutra from the moment he first attained the way. However, because the people were not yet mature enough to understand, he had to employ provisional teachings as expedient means for some forty years before he could expound the true teaching of the Lotus Sutra. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 393)

The Lotus Sutra described Shakyamuni's original attainment of enlightenment in an inconceivably remote time in the past, demonstrating the universal and eternal existence of the Buddha nature in all life. However, he did not directly reveal the original cause that enabled him to attain enlightenment. Shakyamuni implied the "true cause" by stating in the Lotus Sutra, "originally I practised the bodhisattva way,"

but emphasized the "true effect," in revealing his own enlightenment in the remote past. Daisaku Ikeda explains in his lecture on the Lotus Sutra,

By contrast, the Daishonin's Buddhism emphasizes the true cause. The ordinary beings of the nine worlds are seen as central and not subsidiary. This is because the beings of the Latter Day [the period beginning 2,000 years after Shakyamuni's death] in need of liberation are ordinary people. For this reason, we need to look again at the passage expressing the mystic principle of the true cause, "originally I practised the bodhisattva way."

Just what, ultimately, is the driving force that enabled Shakyamuni the common mortal to attain the life span of immeasurable wisdom as a result of carrying out bodhisattva practices in the remote past?

It is none other than Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is hidden in the depths of "originally I practised the bodhisattva way." (*Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 3, p. 12)

NICHIREN DAISHONIN— THE BUDDHA OF THE ESSENTIAL TEACHING

Myoho-enge-kyo is the title of the Lotus Sutra, which Nichiren Daishonin declared is the essence of the entire sutra. He added the word *nam*, meaning “to devote oneself,” and prescribed chanting this title as the cause to awaken the Buddha nature within one’s life. Because he revealed the true cause that enables all people to gain access to their Buddha nature, Nichiren Daishonin is called the Buddha of the true cause and the Buddha of the essential teaching.

Nichiren Daishonin lived from 1222 to 1282, during a time of social unrest and natural catastrophes in Japan. The son of a fisherman, he became a religious acolyte, and after a period of intensive study and practice, attained the state of enlightenment. Through his experience, and after studying all the sutras thoroughly, he affirmed that the Lotus Sutra constitutes the heart of the Buddhist teachings. In particular, the title, *Myoho-enge-kyo*, is the essence of the Lotus Sutra. He subsequently dedicated his life to sharing his realization with people, regardless of their social standing, gender or education. From the outset of his efforts, he faced persecutions from the feudal authorities, who felt threatened by his teachings of equality and self-determination.

The name Nichiren literally means “sun-lotus.” He took this name to signify his purpose in life: to transmit the essence of the Lotus Sutra, like the rising of the sun within human life and society. The honorific title “Daishonin” applied to Nichiren by his disciples means “great sage” or “Buddha.”

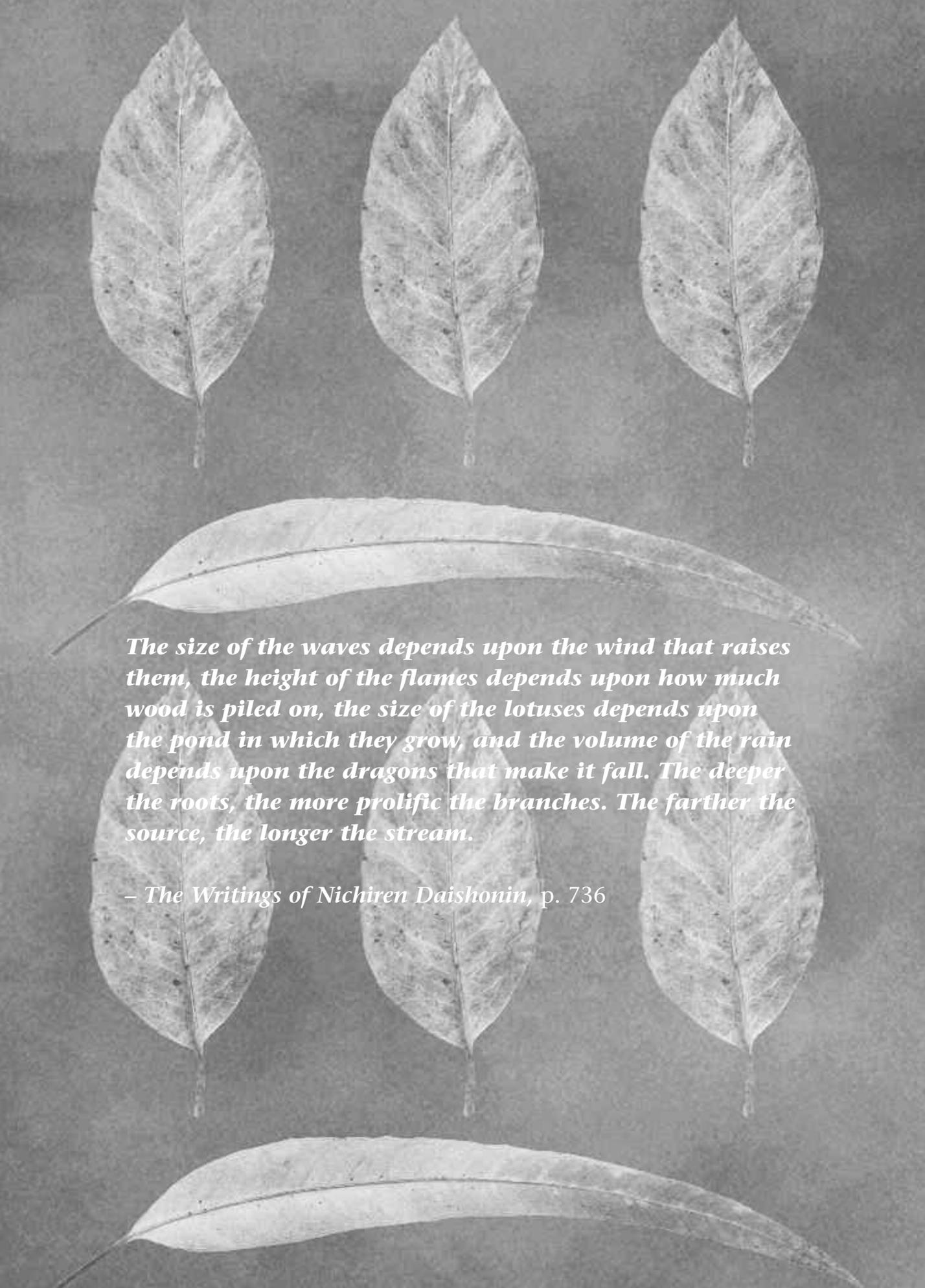
Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism begins with the conviction that all individuals have the potential to achieve enlightenment through their own efforts. According to his teachings, the workings of the universe are all subject to a single principle or law. By perceiving and directly experiencing that law, individuals can unlock the hidden potential within their own lives and achieve creative harmony with their fellow humans, the earth and the cosmos itself. This law

is expressed as the essential teaching of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

This philosophy, therefore, is a vehicle of individual empowerment. Each individual has the capacity to overcome the inevitable sufferings of life, and in the process can become a powerful, positive influence in the community, society and the world. Its scope is revolutionary in that it enables us to develop the wisdom to understand and act on the profound connection between our own happiness and that of others. The greatest personal fulfillment in life is realized by working for the happiness of others. This is not only due to the obvious merits of compassionate acts. The Lotus Sutra teaches that the creative force of the universe itself flows from compassion on the cosmic level. Attaining Buddhahood and living a life of compassion therefore produce a state of total oneness with the eternal life of the universe.

The core philosophy of the SGI can be found in the foreword to *The Human Revolution*, a novelized account of the history of the Soka Gakkai written by Daisaku Ikeda: “A great revolution of character in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a society, and further, will enable a change in the destiny of humankind.” The goal of this process of inner-directed transformation is centred on the principle that the influence of each human act extends beyond its immediate context to the larger web of life. World peace begins in the heart of each of us. It is built by a revolution within.

The “culture of peace” that the world is seeking must flow from the hearts of the people. It cannot be legislated, for laws alone cannot guarantee the quality of life beyond a certain point. Nor can social reform by itself help individuals who are suffering from unhappiness and the raging storms of their destiny. However, when people possess inner strength and are filled with joy, wisdom and compassion, we can change our families, our communities and society. This is the way of human revolution.



The size of the waves depends upon the wind that raises them, the height of the flames depends upon how much wood is piled on, the size of the lotuses depends upon the pond in which they grow, and the volume of the rain depends upon the dragons that make it fall. The deeper the roots, the more prolific the branches. The farther the source, the longer the stream.

– The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 736

3. THE PRACTICE OF NICHIREN BUDDHISM

One of the distinguishing features of Buddhism is its emphasis on practice. Rather than presenting a set of dogmatic beliefs that are to be accepted without question, the Buddhist approach is based on seeking the answers to questions. A questioning mind is therefore not only desirable, but is actually vital to the practice of Buddhism.

When Shakyamuni set out on his quest for enlightenment, he was seeking the answers to the most important questions of life and death: Why are we born, why must we suffer, what becomes of us after death, and what is the true meaning of life? The teachings that came to be known as Buddhism were distilled from the Buddha's own experience of attaining enlightenment, as he perceived within himself the ultimate reality of life and death. The philosophy and the practice, revealed in their essence by Nichiren Daishonin, are the tools with which each person can set out on his or her individual quest and successfully reach the same state of life as the Buddha.

FAITH, PRACTICE AND STUDY

There are three main elements to the practice of Buddhism: faith, practice and study. Each of these elements is important and serves to deepen and strengthen the others.

Faith, first of all, does not mean blind belief. Buddhism is based on reason and practical application in daily life. Therefore, in Buddhism, faith is a lifelong process of accumulating experiences, which confirm the validity of the philosophy within the context of one's own life. It is impossible to truly believe in something with which we have no direct experience. Therefore, in the beginning of one's practice, all that is needed is an open mind and some level

of expectation. Buddhism puts great emphasis on the necessity of "actual proof," some discernable result of the application of the practice. This could be in the realm of spiritual or emotional improvement, increased energy or improved physical health, or in other areas such as relations with others.

Central to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the daily practice of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Myoho-enge-kyo, the title and opening phrase of the Lotus Sutra, is the essential teaching of all the 84,000 sutras that Shakyamuni expounded. He described his teachings as "the diary of one's own life."

The word *nam* means devotion to this essential teaching. When we chant this phrase we are invoking the essence of our own life as well as that of the universe itself. The Buddhist idea of prayer is in this sense very different from the concept of appealing to some external power. Buddhism teaches that the creative power of life is inherent in every atom of every entity in the universe. The reason we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is to awaken this creative power that lies dormant within.

The effects of chanting can be experienced almost immediately. The development of faith, or conviction, is therefore a natural process of growth over time. Belief emerges as a result of one's sincere efforts to practise and to be open to this inner potential. Faith in Buddhism might also be described as the will to practise and the desire to grow as a human being.

Practice has two dimensions: practice for self and practice for others. Practice for self essentially means our daily chanting of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and reciting two portions of the Lotus Sutra (called gongyo—See p.41). One chants for his or her own goals and development, transforming one's inner life and revealing the Buddha nature. The two most essential qualities of Buddhahood are

wisdom and compassion. Chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo activates the most profound level of consciousness and results in the opening and expansion of our state of being.

Practising for others is the expression of compassion, which is inspired by the significant changes within that are experienced as a result of chanting. Practice for others includes teaching others about the Buddhist philosophy. The ultimate desire of the Buddha is to enable all beings to share the same condition of enlightenment. As one's faith and practice develop so does the desire to share the same aspiration.

The Soka Gakkai International is, above all else, a gathering of people dedicated to this noble purpose. SGI activities such as discussion and study meetings provide opportunities for people to encourage one another by sharing their experiences of using the philosophy in everyday life. This is expressed in a unique form of life-to-life dialogue, which resonates with individuals of all ages and backgrounds, and creates a profound sense of the deep bonds we all share as human beings.

Study, the third element, is more than the mere intellectual pursuit of knowledge. The study of the philosophy of Buddhism fuels the development of one's faith and practice, igniting profound insights into life's mysteries.

MOTIVATION TO PRACTISE

The most important point about Buddhist practice is that it is self-motivated. As in Socrates' well-known maxim, "Know thyself," the Buddhist philosophy is focused on the discovery of the "greater self" of Buddhahood that lies within each of us, as opposed to the lesser, self-centred ego. As Nichiren Daishonin states in one of his writings,

If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally

inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-rence-kyo. Chanting Myoho-rence-kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life. (*Writings*, p. 3)

Of course, many people who practise this Buddhism were not necessarily motivated by a desire to "attain enlightenment" when they first began. Indeed, for many, enlightenment might be quite an unfamiliar idea. Many people's first attempts at chanting might be motivated by their own particular circumstances: illness, family problems, personal goals, or even simple curiosity. Others are attracted to the humanistic values of Buddhism as a means to work toward peace. As long as it is meaningful to an individual, any motivation is valid, whether it seems more focused on self or others in the beginning.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is not an esoteric philosophy that is separate from everyday life and its concerns. The Buddhist spirit of compassion means that everyone can begin from where they are right now. For this reason, the practice can and should be applied to real-life concerns and aspirations. This is consistent with the Buddhist principles of the oneness of body and mind (or the physical and spiritual aspects of life), the oneness of self and the environment, and the principle, "faith equals daily life."

The idea of having goals might seem an unlikely way to begin practising a religious philosophy. However, any kind of aspiration requires efforts directed at reaching a goal. When we chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, we need to be focused; but it is difficult to simply forget our worries and concerns and to try to focus on some unknown quality called Buddhahood. Nichiren Daishonin teaches that Buddhahood includes all aspects of life, and that our desires and sufferings are connected to the awakening of our Buddha nature. He characterizes desires and sufferings as functioning like firewood. One of his teachings states, "Now Nichiren and others who chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo...burn the firewood of earthly desires and behold the fire of enlightened wisdom." When we

begin to practise, therefore, it is perfectly all right to focus on what we feel is most important for our lives. For some, chanting for others might be more important than chanting for personal goals. This is fine too. Our heartfelt sincerity is what counts above all.

An important aspect of the process of perceiving and activating our Buddha nature is having an attitude of self-reflection. For example, a person might at first be wholly focused on overcoming a particular problem or achieving a certain goal. As the person continues to practise and study, he or she begins to develop a sense of calm and well-being, a lessening of stress, and the discovery of the means to achieve various goals. As this happens, the person's perception of his or her life begins to deepen and expand, revealing a greater sense of self that recognizes the interdependence of all life. This greater self sees life filled with hope, possibilities and challenges rather than problems and limitations.

This expanded "life space" allows one to reflect and to see things from a perspective of heightened personal empowerment, opening one's capacity and genuine desire for compassion. Our starting point, if we are really going to transform our state of life, must be that of recognizing and accepting ourselves as we are, regardless of our problems or shortcomings. We begin with the reformation of our own lives, learning who we really are and what we really need. At the same time, we develop our ability to help others, thus enabling us to fulfill the Buddhist way of practice for self and others.

In reality, practice for self and others is simultaneous and mutually enhances both. When we chant, our compassionate higher self is aroused, so we naturally become increasingly inclined to extend our prayers to others. By the same token, when we help others, we experience a deeper sense of meaning, which powerfully elevates our own state of life. In this way, Buddhism can be understood as the study and practice of how to live as a human being, integrated and whole individually, and extending our

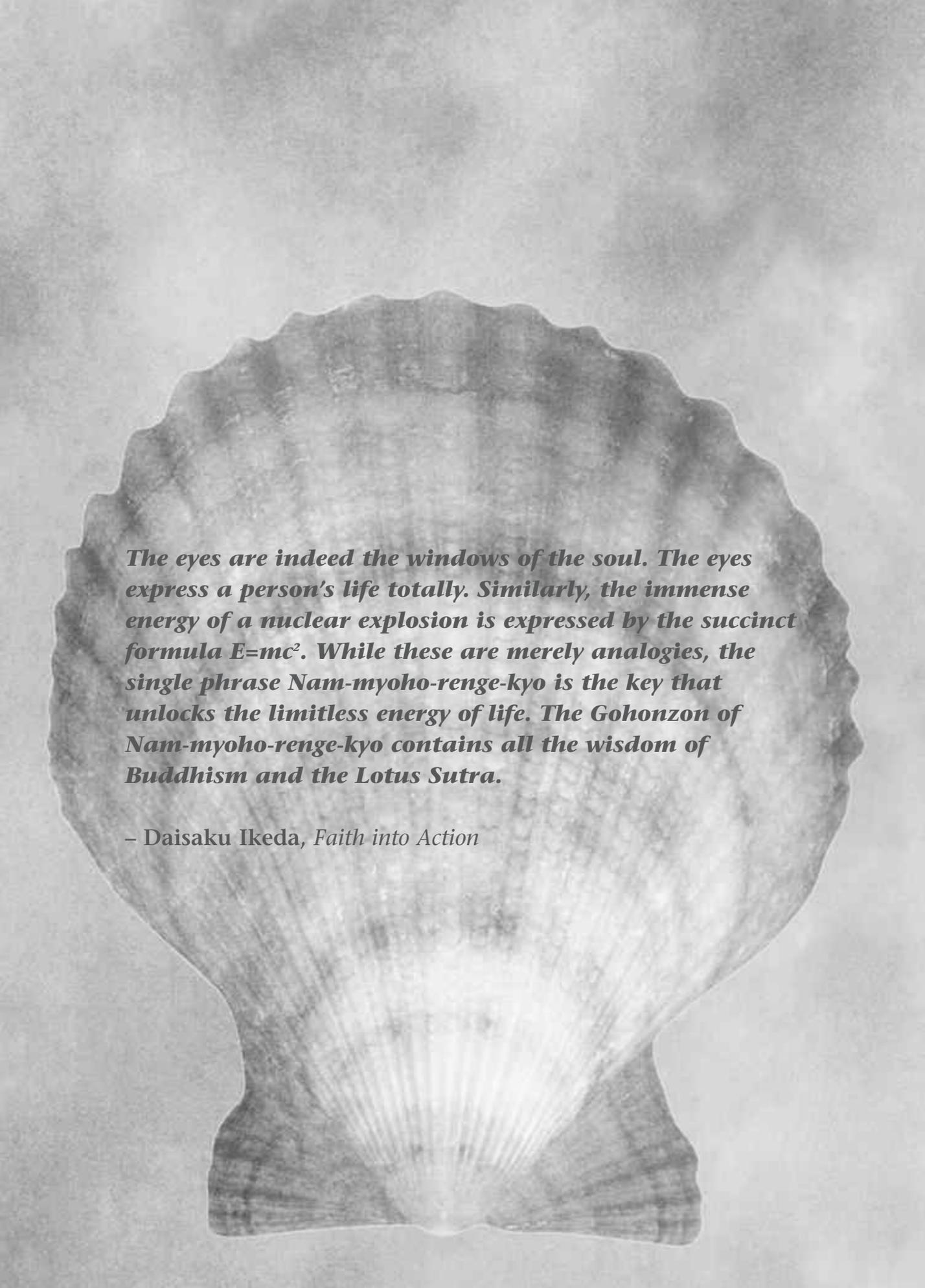
hearts into the weaving of a rich and expanding tapestry of harmony among our fellow humans.

PRACTISING IN THE SGI ORGANIZATION

People carry out the practice of Nichiren Buddhism by doing gongyo and chanting at home in the morning and evening, and participating in local discussion and study meetings, which are held at members' homes. There are also various meetings and activities held at SGI centres and in the community. The model of the SGI organization is based on the Buddhist tradition of the *samgha*, or the gathering of the Buddha's disciples, to learn together and share the spirit of advancing our growth as humans toward the development of a peaceful society. Individuals cannot achieve this ideal in isolation, as we need to interact with others in order to develop our higher qualities and overcome our prejudices and weaknesses.

SGI meetings are an educational forum, from which we can learn important lessons to apply in our daily lives, our families and society. They also provide tremendous opportunities to contribute to helping others who are struggling with real-life problems. Members relate their experiences of using the practice in their lives, and guests and newer members are encouraged to ask questions in an open and friendly atmosphere. At study meetings, participants study Nichiren Daishonin's writings and discuss their application to their lives.

In this way, people are encouraged to practise and study individually, as well as to get together to learn and teach others.



The eyes are indeed the windows of the soul. The eyes express a person's life totally. Similarly, the immense energy of a nuclear explosion is expressed by the succinct formula $E=mc^2$. While these are merely analogies, the single phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the key that unlocks the limitless energy of life. The Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contains all the wisdom of Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra.

- Daisaku Ikeda, Faith into Action

4. NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO AND THE GOHONZON

The Meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

As was noted earlier, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essential practice of Nichiren Buddhism. It is the expression of the universal law of life. We might say that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the “voice” or “song” of the universal life force. When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we are in effect tuning our individual selves into the greater “self” of the universe. Buddhism teaches that life is eternal and boundless, and that our lives have no beginning and no end. All life forms, including the stars and everything in the universe, go through the eternal cycle of birth, growth, aging and death, to be followed by rebirth and the same cycle, according to the karma (or accumulated causes) of that particular person or entity. Nichiren Daishonin describes the eternity of life as follows:

To conceive of life and death as separate realities is to be caught in the illusion of birth and death. It is deluded and inverted thinking.

When we examine the nature of life with perfect enlightenment, [i.e., the true enlightenment of one who has awakened from the dream of illusions], we find that there is no beginning marking birth and, therefore, no end signifying death.

Doesn't life as thus conceived already transcend birth and death?

Life cannot be consumed by the fire at the end of the kalpa [an eon], nor can it be washed away by floods. It can be neither cut by swords nor pierced by arrows.

Although it can fit inside a mustard seed, the seed does not expand, nor does life contract. Although it fills the vastness of space, space is not too wide, nor is life too small. (*Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshū* [collected writings of Nichiren Daishonin], p. 563)

Such descriptions give us an indication of the endless wonder and mystery that is life. Developing the capacity to directly experience this wonder and live with this awareness on a daily basis is the goal of Buddhist practice.

NAM

The first word, *nam*, is derived from the Sanskrit word, *namas*, which means “to devote oneself.” Myoho-renge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra, is the name, so to speak, of the ultimate reality. Nichiren Daishonin explains that the entire Lotus Sutra is dedicated to the clarification of the Law of Myoho-renge-kyo. This phrase incorporates

the two essential aspects of Buddhism: one is the truth itself, and the other is the practice to develop the wisdom to realize that truth. This dual nature of the phrase also demonstrates the simultaneity of cause and effect. The cause is our practice; the effect is the attainment of Buddhahood.

The devotion indicated by *nam* is directed to fusing our lives, both body and mind (the physical and spiritual aspects of life), with the law of Myoho-renge-kyo. One aspect of *nam* is that we devote our lives to, or fuse our lives with, the ultimate, unchanging reality. The other is that, through this fusion, we are simultaneously capable of drawing forth wisdom, which functions in accordance with our changing circumstances. This wisdom is the means whereby we human beings can experience boundless joy and freedom despite all the uncertainties of our daily lives.

MYOHO

The word *myoho* means, literally, “the Mystic Law,” *myo* meaning “mystic” and *ho* meaning “law.” *Myo* indicates the law of life that is infinitely profound and beyond all conceptions of the human mind. As Nichiren Daishonin explains,

What then does *myo* signify? It is simply the mysterious nature of our lives from moment to moment, which the mind cannot comprehend nor words express. When we look into our own mind at any moment, we perceive neither colour nor form to verify that it exists. Yet we still cannot say it does not exist, for many differing thoughts continually occur. The mind cannot be considered either to exist or not to exist. Life is indeed an elusive reality that transcends both the words and the concepts of existence and non-existence. It is neither existence nor non-existence, yet exhibits the qualities of both. It is the mystic entity of the Middle Way that is the ultimate reality. *Myo* is the name given to the mystic nature of life,

and *ho*, to its manifestations.
(*Writings*, p. 4)

In other words, *myo* is the ultimate reality, and *ho* is the world of phenomena in its ever-changing forms. The union of these two concepts, as represented by the single word *myoho*, reflects the essential oneness of the ultimate reality and the manifest world. Buddhism teaches that there is no fundamental distinction between the ultimate reality and the everyday one. Attaining Buddhahood is, therefore, the ultimate experience of living in the here and now, not an otherworldly existence or something we only encounter after death. To be able to experience this essential oneness is to perceive eternity in every moment. The poet William Blake described something akin to this in his “Auguries of Innocence”:

*To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of
your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.*

Myo expresses the “enlightened” and *ho* the “deluded” aspects of life, which coexist within ourselves as well as throughout the universe. However, the aspect we experience in any given moment depends on whether or not we are awakened to the ultimate reality.

Myoho also indicates the two aspects of what we perceive as opposites, “life” and “death,” but which essentially are one. *Myo* corresponds to death, the latent aspect of life, and *ho* represents life in its manifest state. Because the state of death, where our lives merge back into cosmic life, is beyond our conception, it is characterized by *myo*, meaning “mystic” or “inconceivable.” *Ho* is the manifest, perceptible aspect of life, as we know it in terms of our everyday experience. Life and death are the two contrasting manifestations of the ultimate reality, or Mystic Law. At the same time, as we gradually learn from our Buddhist practice, the ultimate reality is increasingly experienced in the everyday realities of life and death. Because death is the ultimate fear of all humans, developing a clear perception of the oneness of life and death is the key to conquering all other forms of suffering.

RENGE

The word *renge* literally means “lotus blossom.” There are several ways in which the lotus flower is significant in Buddhism.

The qualities of purity and eternity attributed to the lotus have appealed to human beings since ancient times. The image of the lotus blooming in a muddy swamp is a metaphor for the emergence of Buddhahood in the midst of the impurities and problems of life in society. Just as the lotus becomes more beautiful and fragrant in a swamp, so do we manifest the attributes of enlightenment as a result of our struggles with negative forces, both within ourselves and in our surroundings. In his *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, T’ien-t’ai, a great Buddhist scholar who is recognized as the leading interpreter of the Lotus Sutra prior to Nichiren Daishonin, explains that the word “lotus” in the sutra’s title should be understood not only as a metaphor for the Mystic Law but also as the Law itself. He states:

Now the name *renge* is not intended as a symbol for anything. It is the teaching expounded in the Lotus Sutra. The teaching expounded in the Lotus Sutra is pure and undefiled and explains the subtleties of cause and effect. (*Writings*, p. 421)

Nichiren Daishonin further explains:

This passage of commentary means that supreme principle [that is the Mystic Law] was originally without a name. When the sage was observing the principle and assigning names to all things, he perceived that there is this wonderful single Law [*myoho*] that simultaneously possesses both cause and effect [*renge*], and he named it Myoho-*renge*. This single Law that is Myoho-*renge* encompasses within all the phenomena comprising the Ten Worlds and the three thousand realms, and is lacking in none of them. Anyone who practises this Law will obtain both the cause and the effect of Buddhahood simultaneously. (*Ibid.*)

The lotus plant produces its blossoms and its seedpods at the same time, thereby representing “the wonderful single Law that simultaneously possesses both cause and effect.” This principle, the simultaneity of cause and effect, means that the lives of ordinary people (cause) and the state of Buddhahood (effect) exist simultaneously in every moment of life, and so there is no essential difference between a Buddha and an ordinary person. In terms of practice, the moment any individual chants Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo* (cause), the state of Buddhahood (effect) instantaneously emerges.

We can see this principle in the phenomenon of birth. At the moment of birth, a simultaneous cause has been made for that person’s death. Although death will occur at a later time, the cause is indelibly engraved in the person’s life. Other causes are less fixed, and their effects can be altered, as long as one makes sufficiently strong causes before the effects become manifest. For example, a person who tends to become angry easily can, by making repeated efforts to reflect carefully before reacting to situations, gradually gain a certain degree of self-control, resulting in fewer negative interactions with others.

There is a further dimension to this relationship of cause and effect—the interaction of the person with his or her environment. This can dramatically affect not only the length of the individual’s current life but also its quality. Therefore, Buddhism should not be viewed as fatalistic. On the contrary, our lives can change profoundly, depending on what causes are made from this moment onward. As we bring forth the supreme condition of Buddhahood from within ourselves, the entire network of causes and effects is transformed, flowing from enlightenment rather than delusion, and working to advance our development as a human being.

The principle of the Mystic Law (*myoho*), the ultimate reality of life and death represented by the state of Buddhahood, is activated by the simultaneity of cause and effect (*renge*). Thus *myoho-renge* is the heart of Nam-myoho-*renge-kyo*, the actualization of enlightenment within a person’s life. This

actualization is accomplished through the action of devotion (*nam*) and through the medium of the voice (*kyo*).

KYO

Kyo literally means “sutra,” or the Buddha’s teachings, which are conveyed through his own voice. Therefore, *kyo* is also interpreted to mean “sound.” Nichiren Daishonin describes *kyo* as “the words and speech, sounds and voices of all living beings.” He also says, “that which is eternal, spanning the three existences [of past, present and future] is called *kyo*.” We can think of *kyo* as the realms of time and space through which life flows.

The voice is the medium whereby both the physical and spiritual aspects of our lives are brought together and given expression. As Nichiren Daishonin says, “The voice does the Buddha’s work.” It is in order to bring about the unity of spiritual and physical devotion contained in *nam* that we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo out loud, rather than merely meditating upon it. This act of chanting is the actual cause, manifested from within and radiating outward to our environment, which generates the life force, wisdom and compassion of the Buddha nature. Our chanting fuses with the Buddha nature all around us, and returns to us through re-absorbing our own voice chanting. We are thus able to feel at one with the world around us—other people, nature and the greater universe—and experience the unlimited and eternal power of life even as we carry on our day-to-day existence.

Chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo can be regarded as a profound communication with the inner depths of our consciousness—a consciousness that is in reality shared by all living beings throughout time and space. Although it engages our senses of sight and hearing, it is so far-reaching that its effects are not limited only to those with sight, hearing and speech. There are many people practising who are blind, deaf or mute, and they enjoy the same benefits as those who have these faculties.

The experience of living in such intimate and direct relationship with life’s essence is

one of unmatched exhilaration and insight. Every encounter, every event in our lives takes on profound significance. Even difficulties become valuable learning experiences that lead to further development. All aspects of life, both good and bad, take on meaning and serve to reveal our greater potential.

How chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo might affect us differently from practising any other spiritual practice is a matter for the individual to determine. But only direct application of the practice can enable each of us to make our own assessment. For this reason, people who are interested in this philosophy are encouraged to try it for themselves, because understanding the theory is no substitute for first-hand experience.

The Gohonzon

The Gohonzon is the object of devotion in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. It embodies the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. The Gohonzon is a mandala, inscribed on a paper scroll or wooden tablet, with characters in Chinese and Sanskrit calligraphy representing all the possible conditions of life, from the depths of suffering to the highest condition of Buddhahood.

Nichiren Buddhism teaches that all people possess the Buddha nature and can attain Buddhahood through faith and practice centred on the Gohonzon.

Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the original Gohonzon. He states in one of his writings, “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart” (*Writings*, p. 412). This means that the life condition of Buddhahood is embodied in the Gohonzon, so that when we focus on it while chanting, our Buddha nature is stimulated. Nichiren Daishonin explains:

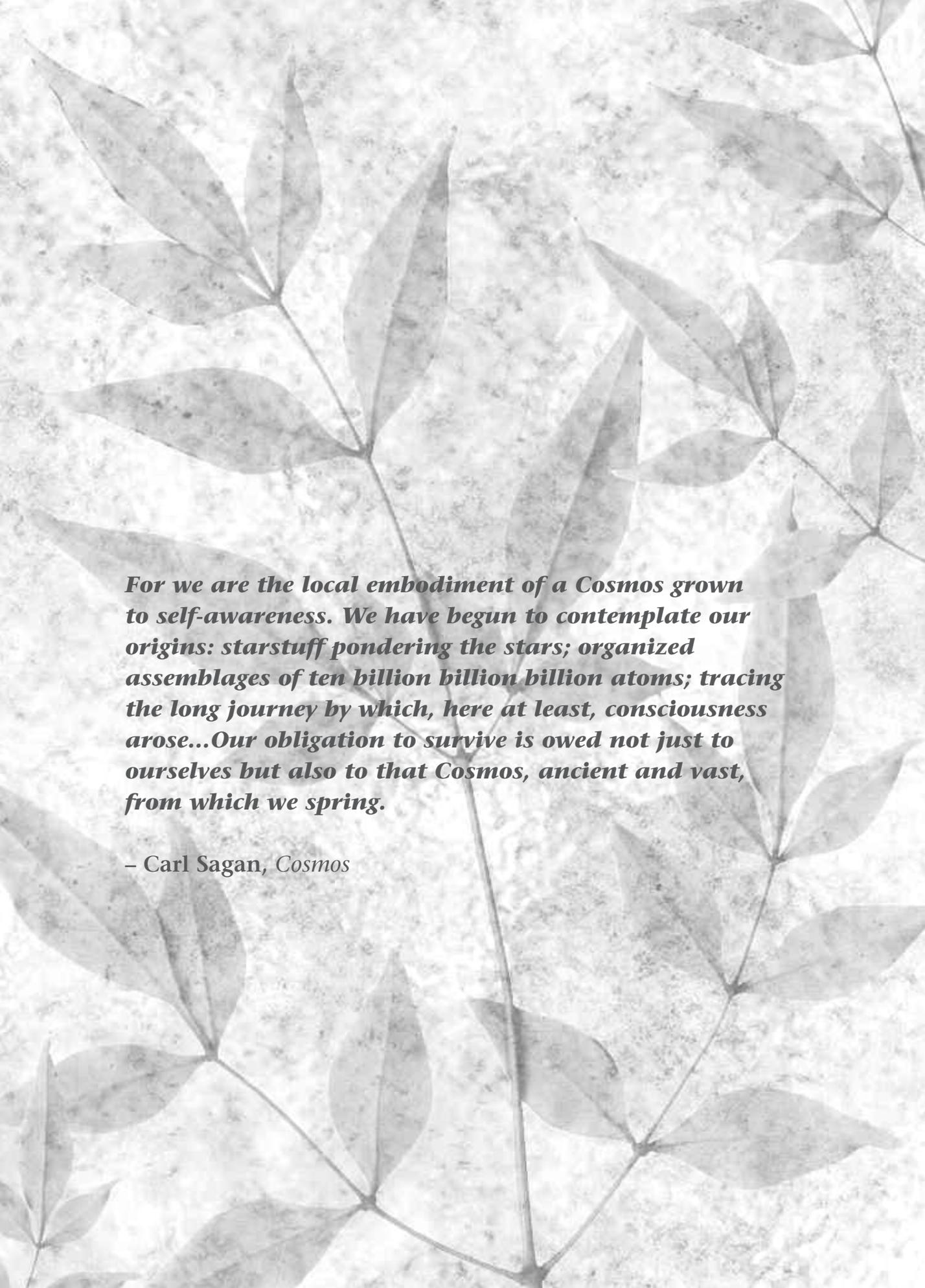
Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. The body is the palace of the ninth consciousness, the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life’s functions. To be endowed

with the Ten Worlds means that all ten, without a single exception, exist in one world. Because of this it is called a mandala. Mandala is a Sanskrit word that is translated as “perfectly endowed” or “a cluster of blessings.” (*Writings*, p. 832)

The Gohonzon is called “the object of devotion for observing the mind.” We might regard the Gohonzon as a kind of mirror that reflects our inner state of life. When we chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo to it, our inner Buddha nature is awakened and we are able to feel or perceive it. This is what “observing the mind” means.

Having an external stimulus is consistent with the Buddhist concept of the oneness of self and environment. For example, when we view a beautiful sunset, the sense of beauty within us fuses with what we perceive in the environment. When we hear a piece of inspiring music, we instinctively respond because we already have the matching capacity within us to appreciate it. Similarly, electrical energy is all around us, and when we have a suitable conductor we are able to harness this energy. By chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo to the Gohonzon, we manifest the life condition of Buddhahood within and fuse our lives with the Buddha nature of the universe.

SGI President Ikeda has compared the experience of chanting to the Gohonzon as a dialogue with the Buddha, or as an exploration of the cosmos, all taking place within the depths of our own consciousness. As Buddhahood is our original state of life, the Gohonzon awakens our recognition of that state. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda went so far as to say that Buddhahood is not acquired—it is recollected from the infinite past of our own true selves.



For we are the local embodiment of a Cosmos grown to self-awareness. We have begun to contemplate our origins: starstuff pondering the stars; organized assemblages of ten billion billion billion atoms; tracing the long journey by which, here at least, consciousness arose...Our obligation to survive is owed not just to ourselves but also to that Cosmos, ancient and vast, from which we spring.

– Carl Sagan, Cosmos

5. THE BUDDHIST VIEW OF LIFE

The Ten Worlds

LIFE'S UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

Life and Death as an Integrated Whole

Buddhism describes the experience of living in a unique way. In the Western world there is a tendency to consider the spiritual and physical aspects of life as separate, usually placing the value of the spiritual above that of the physical. This dualistic attitude toward the mind and the body extends to the natural world, which is regarded as something we can reduce to its separate components. The presumption that humans can “engineer” and even “improve” the way nature works is shortsighted and perilous, for all life forms are interconnected and interdependent. At the same time, our understanding of the subtle workings of the human mind and spirituality have also suffered from science’s insistence on an extremely narrow form of empirical evidence. Things that were once considered “matters of the heart” are redefined in the clinical language of psychological theories, which sometimes take a similarly limited view of human life.

Even some of the interpretations of the Western world’s philosophical traditions see human life as sharply divided between the imperfect, even defiled physical world, and the ethereal, pure world of the spirit. The soul tends to be considered as a separate entity from the body, freed from its grip in death. This duality extends to the way we view

ourselves as separate from others and from our environment, to the point of seeing ourselves as either the masters of other life forms or as an insignificant speck in the universe. Such a sense of isolation can lead us to feel that we must compete with others in order to gain what we need to survive, even if our gains are made at the expense of others. Life and death are generally regarded as distinct opposites, so we cling to life for fear of death. We can thus identify two great fears that underlie almost all others—the fear of being alone and the fear of death.

In contrast, Buddhism views life and death as an integrated whole, which appears to be two but is in reality one. This concept is known as “dependent origination.” Essentially, it means that one aspect of life cannot exist without the other. Without the physical aspect, the spiritual aspect cannot exist, and vice versa. Life and death, happiness and suffering, enlightenment and delusion—all coexist throughout time and space and are inherent in everything.

Holistic medicine has to some degree revealed the close relationship between mind and body—how one’s psychological or emotional state can affect one’s body chemistry and its physical condition. Buddhism teaches that the physical and the spiritual aspects of life have equal value; furthermore, both aspects can be either positive or negative, enlightened or deluded.

Science has so far been unable to clearly define consciousness, because it cannot be measured by conventional scientific methods

of empirical observation. Yet each of us instinctively knows that we are conscious because we perceive it from within. Our sense of being, our consciousness, is far more than mere impulses from our brains and central nervous systems. The innate creative intelligence of the universe can be seen in the cells in our bodies, which operate in a unified and harmonious system. The fact that life has even come into being, and that the universe operates in accordance with an unseen, unifying principle, is proof of this principle's existence. In Buddhism, this unifying principle is called the Mystic Law, or Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

THE MUTUAL POSSESSION OF THE TEN STATES OF LIFE

Living is a moment-by-moment experience. It involves all the aspects of our lives—physical, emotional and psychological—which change at each moment in response to stimuli from our environment, or from our own inner feelings. These momentary states are categorized in Buddhism as the Ten Worlds. They cover the entire spectrum of life experiences, from the most desperate suffering to the most sublime condition of enlightenment.

We possess all of these ten states as ever-present potentialities, which we can experience at any moment. The human mind changes with every occurring thought or circumstance. Our inclination is to seek happiness by attempting to control our outward circumstances, believing that favourable circumstances will provide us with fulfillment or will at least eliminate the causes of our sufferings. The problem is that no matter how much power or financial resources we might possess to exert influence over the outer world, nothing in the world around us can be made “just right”; everything is in a state of constant change. All that exists goes through the cycle of birth, growth, aging and death, so even if we could build an ideal world for ourselves, it could never be permanent. This is the first truth that Shakyamuni Buddha taught. His next lesson was that the unfailing stability we so

dearly desire is found nowhere but within ourselves. Once we have discovered life's eternal essence within, we are able to creatively integrate our lives with the outer world, making the experience of living an exciting challenge.

When a powerful inner change takes place, our circumstances, including our health and our ability to achieve success, also change in dramatic ways. Nichiren Daishonin states:

Life at each moment encompasses the body and the mind and the self and environment of all sentient beings in the Ten Worlds as well as all insentient beings in the three thousand realms, including plants, sky, earth, and even the minutest particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the entire realm of phenomena. To be awakened to this principle is itself the mutually inclusive relationship of life at each moment and all phenomena. (*Writings*, p.3)

We also find a similar insight expressed by the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who wrote,

Two things fill the mind with ever-increasing wonder and awe, the more often and the more intensely the mind of thought is drawn to them: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me. (*Critique of Practical Reason*)

Unlocking the mysteries of life and death is precisely the aim of Buddhist faith and practice. The Buddha declared, on the basis of his own experience, that this awareness lies within the depths of our own consciousness—a consciousness that possesses the same wisdom that gives rise to life in all of its magnificent forms. The universe is not a gigantic empty place containing life here and there. The universe itself is alive—a great, infinite life, of which we are all inseparable parts. Every atom contains the seed of life, and even the invisible void of space pulsates with the same cosmic rhythm. In life or in death, the oneness of our lives and the universe continues without ever being interrupted. However, merely recognizing this intellectually is completely different from

living it and feeling it, just as seeing or reading about an experience is different from actually experiencing it.

The Ten Worlds describe the various states of being in any given moment. They range from hell to Buddhahood. The Ten Worlds were described in earlier Buddhist scriptures as distinctly separate realms where beings in these states of life dwelled. However, the Lotus Sutra, the final, and most profound of Shakyamuni's teachings, clarified that the Ten Worlds actually refer to the ten different states that one can experience at any given moment, and that they are all inherent in every life form and within the environment itself. This is called the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. Nichiren Daishonin explains,

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. These worlds, the six paths, are all present in the physical appearance of the person's face. The remaining four noble worlds are hidden and dormant and do not appear in the face, but if we search carefully, we can tell they are there. (*Writings*, p. 358)

Following is a brief description of each of the Ten Worlds:

- 1. The World of HELL** is a state of suffering and despair, when a person feels trapped and is unable to see beyond a prison of pain and hopelessness. This feeling of being powerless finds expression in hopeless depression or uncontrollable rage, leading to destructive behaviour toward oneself and/or others.
- 2. The World of HUNGRY SPIRITS** describes the state of being enslaved by selfish desires or cravings, which are a

primitive way of attempting to escape suffering. Lacking in self-awareness, one thrashes about desperately without any sense of purpose but that of satisfying whatever desire is most pressing at the moment.

- 3. The World of ANIMALS** is like the so-called "reptilian brain," the instinct of self-preservation at all costs and without regard for others. There is a sense of purpose, but it is the self-centred aim of survival of the fittest. A person in this state will try to dominate those who are weaker, but will cower before those who are stronger.
- 4. The World of ASURAS** refers to *asuras*, demons in Indian mythology who typify the perverse desire to control others and to be seen as superior. Although self-awareness is more developed, it is warped by an egoistic desire for power for its own sake (as opposed to the state of animality, where selfish power is simply exerted for the sake of getting what one wants). For example, animals will overpower or kill other animals for food, self-protection, or to preserve their territory. Humans, on the other hand, will abuse or sometimes even kill others for pleasure. This is of course the most extreme expression of this life condition.

These four worlds are called the four lower worlds—for obvious reasons. The first three—hell, hunger and animality—correspond to the three poisons of anger, greed and foolishness, or ignorance. We see the three poisons expressed throughout human history in the form of war, poverty and the results of shortsighted selfishness, such as pollution and certain types of diseases. All four of these are negative states, and they are always lurking just below the surface of our consciousness, waiting to spring forward if we let them. Being at the mercy of these lower states of life leads to suffering, for ourselves and for others.

- 5. The World of HUMAN BEINGS**, also described as tranquillity, is a state of being calm and undisturbed. It is

located in the middle of the Ten Worlds, between the four lower worlds and the four higher states, called the four noble worlds. From this state, we are able to reflect and make choices about improving our lives. However, we are still susceptible to the lower worlds if this tranquillity is disturbed.

6. The World of HEAVENLY BEINGS, or rapture, describes the experience of joy or elation when a heartfelt desire is fulfilled or a happy circumstance occurs. Although this state is euphoric, it is easily upset when circumstances change or when a baser impulse sends us into one of the lower worlds. For example, if a person were to suddenly become wealthy or famous, certain kinds of desires might present themselves that were formerly out of the question, and which might compromise our integrity or our sense of purpose.

The worlds from hell to heavenly beings are called the six paths. They describe a way of life that is essentially reactive—always being swayed by whatever life throws up at us. Living this way becomes a kind of vicious circle, and we find we are always at the mercy of changing circumstances; and yet it describes, perhaps more often than we might

realize, the way we tend to live a great deal of the time.

The four noble worlds describe a way of life that is the result of self-reflection and the resolve to improve one's life. This implies the development of resilience to the changing tides of impermanence, and the forging of one's character through diligent effort. Each successive world represents an increasingly complete picture of what it means to be human.

7. The World of VOICE-HEARERS, or learning, refers to Shakyamuni Buddha's disciples, who wish to learn the truth of life and aspire to that truth. When applied to ourselves, this world represents the point at which we make such a decision. It is in general the desire for education and self-improvement, for which we naturally turn to teachers whom we feel we can learn from.

8. The World of CAUSE-AWAKENED ONES, or realization, describes the acquiring of awareness through direct experience with nature, perceiving the law of cause and effect at work in all phenomena.

Although people in these two worlds, called the two vehicles, attain a higher degree of self-development, they also tend to become self-satisfied and arrogant, regarding their achievements as the ultimate definition of their humanity. Shakyamuni warned his disciples not to become attached to the two vehicles, lest they become self-centred and attached to partial truths.

9. The World of BODHISATTVAS is the awakening of the aspiration for the enlightenment of all living beings. A bodhisattava recognizes the inter-relationship of all people and thus, the need for every person to achieve happiness. One's devotion to practice equally for self and for others is the key to entering the state of Buddhahood.

10. The World of BUDDHAS describes those who achieve the supreme state of life, characterized by boundless wisdom and compassion. In this state one is fully awakened to the eternal and ultimate



truth that is the reality of all things. The door has been totally opened to this wisdom; but it is anything but a static or fixed state. Once the portal to Buddhahood has been opened, one's life continues to expand endlessly. This is the true, original state of a human being in perfect harmony with the eternal life of the universe. It is such a powerful experience that the Buddha said even he could not adequately describe it.

The life condition of Buddhahood might sound like something so profound that it must be nearly impossible to achieve. But this is not the case. Nichiren Daishonin explains that Buddhahood is as close as our own eyelashes, but we are unaware of it and unable to see it. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo awakens the Buddha consciousness; but our ability to perceive it is hindered by illusions that have accumulated over the course of our present and previous lives. He explains (keeping in mind that in his time mirrors were made of polished metal) the principle of awakening the Buddha nature in the following way:

When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.
(*Writings*, p. 4)

The Ten Worlds are always within our lives, and we can experience any of them at any time, depending on whether one or another of them is stimulated. Bringing out our enlightened state does not mean "climbing the ladder" of the Ten Worlds. It is more like turning on the lights in a dark

room. Even in the depths of misery in the state of hell, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo revitalizes us and enables us to immediately transform anguish into great joy and wisdom. In Buddhism this is called "changing poison into medicine." At first this joyful state may only surface as brief glimpses. But even the tiniest flicker of hope is like a single spark that can ignite a bright and powerful flame, illuminating a cave that has been dark for thousands of years. Our problems, as well as our desires and dreams, are the fuel for lighting this flame within ourselves. Of course, total transformation takes consistent effort over the course of our lives; but the "enlightening" effect of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is immediate and can be felt in an upsurge of positive energy, a clearing of the mind, and a feeling of deep inner peace. "Faith" in this sense means two things: allowing this energy to flow freely without resisting, and patient, steady effort.

DESTINY AND HUMAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Karma and Rebirth

Central to all major world religions is the idea of eternal life. In some traditions, the spiritual essence, or "soul," lives on forever after the death of the physical body. Buddhism views life as a continual process, in which all life forms, including the planets and stars, undergo the cycle of birth, growth, aging and death.

Existence and non-existence are seen as two inseparable aspects of eternal life. Two fundamental Buddhist concepts, known as "non-substantiality" and "dependent origination," explain the apparently separate phenomena of life and death. Dependent origination states that, because phenomena arise and continue to exist only by virtue of their relationship with other phenomena, they have no fixed substance and in their true state are called "non-substantial."

The unifying Buddhist principle known as the Middle Way clarifies that life is neither existence nor non-existence. All life forms are composed of a temporary union of the

five components of life: form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness. Our lives come into being in our present existence possessing these five components; in other words, we are composed of our physical bodies (form) and our minds, which have the capacity to perceive, conceive, act, and be conscious of our existence. At the time of death, this temporary union dissolves into the life of the universe and becomes a latent potentiality. A Buddha is one who perceives the oneness of spirit and matter and life and its environment and is able to tap the universal consciousness of life as dependent origination: Because this exists, so does that. The temporary existence is thus united and contains the eternal existence, and vice versa.

Daisaku Ikeda explains as follows:

To explain simply, it is generally thought that life begins with birth and ends with death. However, Nichiren Daishonin taught that life is eternal, spanning past, present and future with neither beginning nor end. Birth and death are the two inherent phases, which one's eternal life repeatedly manifests.

With respect to the concept of eternal life in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the *Ongi Kuden* [Orally Transmitted Teachings] states,

"We repeat the cycle of birth and death secure upon the soil of our intrinsic enlightened nature." It also states, "Our birth and death are not the birth and death that we experience for the first time, but the birth and death that are forever inherent in life" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 724).

The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life also states, "Myo represents death, and *ho*, life." To briefly explain, the workings of birth and death, which are eternally inherent in life, manifest the Mystic Law as their true entity. When an individual life manifests itself in concrete form,

that is called "birth," and when it dissolves back into a latent, invisible state, it is called "death"...

Also, Dengyo [a renowned Buddhist scholar] states, "Birth and death are the mysterious workings of the life-essence." Again, in simple terms, that which activates and moves the individual life is called *myo*, the life-essence. When an individual life becomes completely exhausted, it enters the state of death in order to rest and be restored. The *Ongi Kuden* states, "'To depart' means to open out into the universe." As this passage indicates, "departure," or death, is itself a merging of the individual life into the great cosmic life. Then, by virtue of *myo*, the essential power or life force of the cosmos, it is recharged, so to speak, and born into the world anew. The interval of latency is called "death." (*Buddhism and the Cosmos*, pp. 209–210)

The Lotus Sutra teaches that the essential nature of the universe is the continuous creation and enhancement of life—that the basic tendency of the universe is to continue the cycle of birth, growth, aging and death, to be followed by rebirth and the eternal regeneration of the process. Science indicates that life is formed from energy, which manifests itself as matter and consciousness—what we call life, as well as its environment. The principle in physics known as the law of the conservation of energy further teaches that energy cannot be created or destroyed, which can be interpreted to mean that life is both eternal and unlimited. Energy as life takes endless forms, and each of these life forms acquires a certain direction, through actions and interactions with other life forms, in accord with the law of cause and effect. This Buddhist principle is known as karma, which literally means "action."

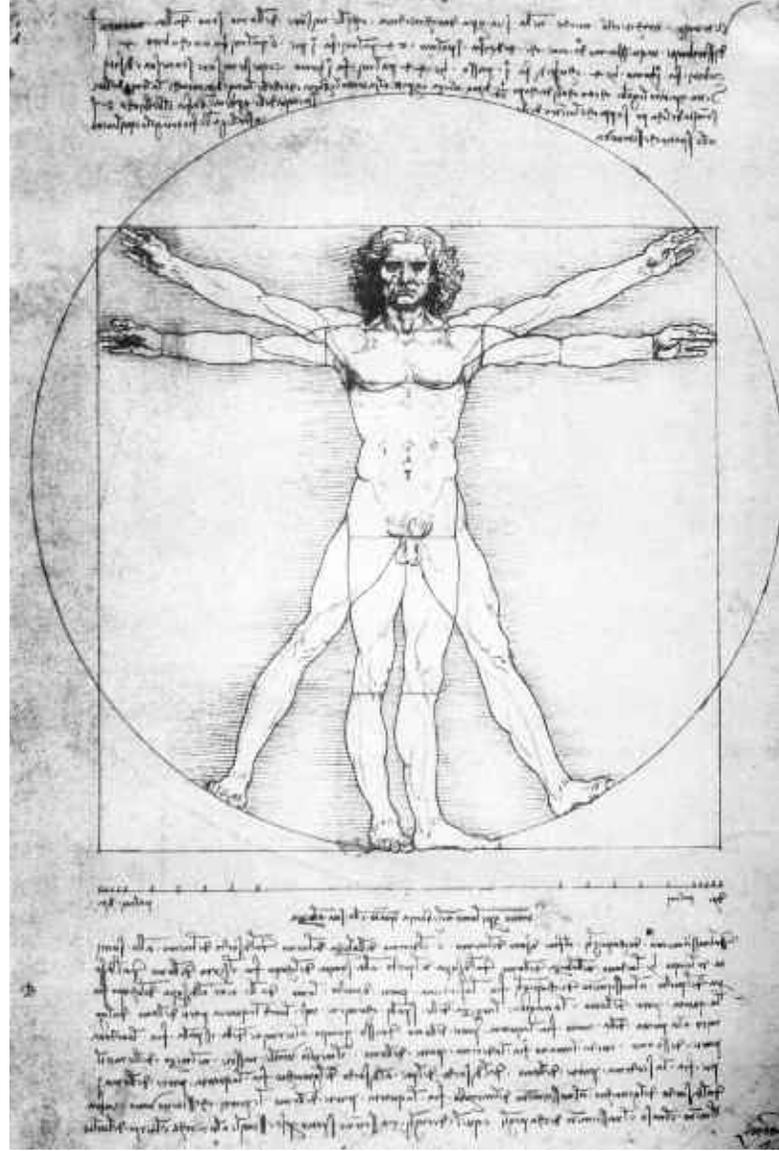
We can think of our present life as one chapter in an ongoing story. The circumstances into which we were born, including the time and place, our family relationships, and our

physical and psychological characteristics—all are the results of accumulated causes formed in the past, including our previous lives. What we think of as destiny is the karmic tendencies we have developed from the past. Some of these tendencies can be changed through our efforts to improve ourselves, but others are more deeply ingrained and are fixed, such as our physical characteristics and the realities of our background. However, there are many important aspects of our karmic tendencies that can be changed, if a sufficiently powerful force can be exerted upon them.

The law of karma is the law of cause and effect. Good causes produce good effects and bad causes produce negative effects. Buddhism teaches that no event or phenomenon is exempt from the law of cause and effect. Therefore, nothing “just happens” without a reason. However, it is very difficult to trace the cause for a particular effect, since we are making causes at every moment without being aware of their possible effects. In addition, we are unable to recall the innumerable causes we have made over the course of countless lifetimes. Because of these two facts, many events or circumstances in our lives seem random or irrational.

But Buddhism is a practical philosophy, focused on how we live our lives here and now to create a better future. More important than being able to analyze the causes of our karma is developing the power to overcome the negative aspects of our karma and create good karma. It must be pointed out here that what constitutes good or bad karma depends on what we decide to do about our circumstances. For example, suppose a person is born poor or with a disability. As a result of such a hardship an individual might become a person of compassion and strength of character, able to help many other people. On the other hand, another person who is born into the same circumstances might instead react with anger and resentment, turning to a life of crime or living in misery.

Conversely, a person might be born into wealth, with good looks and health, and become arrogant and self-centred, leading a life that takes advantage of others. Can we



then say that one person’s karma is inherently good or bad, based only on superficial circumstances? Obviously, it is only natural to desire good circumstances; but in the long run, the real measure of one’s life does not rest with things like how much wealth one has accumulated, especially given the fact that none of the things we acquire in this life can travel with us into the next one. Our only true possession is our condition of life, which can neither be taken away from us nor be given to us by someone else. Therefore, when we speak of changing our karma, we should understand this from the much broader perspective of the totality of our lives, and in relation to what we have achieved and what kind of person we have become.

Nonetheless, suffering, no matter what

form it takes, is a reality; and the Buddha's intent was to enable people to overcome their sufferings. Those who practise Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism have experienced the most remarkable transformations of their lives, both spiritually and in demonstrable ways in their circumstances. The important point is that the changes in their circumstances stem from the deep changes that take place within, in the expansion of each person's humanity. These inner changes are accomplished by facing the realities of karma and challenging them, and by struggling with the negative forces that give rise to them. In this sense, the negative aspects of our karma become the incentive for us to develop our inner lives, and therefore ultimately come to have value in the process of our "human revolution."

HOW KARMA IS FORMED AND CHANGED

The Nine Consciousnesses

What actually happens when a person chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo? To understand, we need to explore the way our consciousness works. Buddhism describes consciousness as having nine levels. First, experience is processed through the senses and then travels into the inner recesses of the subconscious. Through making causes with our thoughts, words and deeds we form karma that is imprinted there. This karma in turn exerts an influence over our behaviour and our relationships with the world around us.

The first five levels of consciousness are the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch—in other words, the conduits through which we absorb experience from the world outside our bodies. The sixth consciousness is the faculty of processing these sensory experiences; it involves our emotions and our instinctive reactions to various painful or pleasurable experiences. For example, when we feel something is hot, the sixth consciousness sends a signal of physical pain and we react by recoiling from the source of that pain.

The seventh consciousness, called *mano*-consciousness, is the seat of self-consciousness

and judgment—what is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, and the decisions we make. But this consciousness is ruled partly by urges and instincts that lie deeper in the subconscious realm. These feelings might be accurate or inaccurate, good or bad, or simply different from those of others, depending on how we have processed our accumulated experiences. For example, a person who has suffered repeated abuse might develop a sense of self that is distorted, triggering strong reactions of stress, anger or a sense of inferiority in situations that recall the past. A more benign example might be the sense of what is beautiful or pleasurable that derives from a person's childhood environment. The seventh consciousness is each individual's unique view of self and of life.

The eighth, or *alaya* (storehouse)-consciousness is the level of consciousness where the results of one's actions (karma), good or evil, accumulate as "seeds"—potential energy that later produces the effects of suffering or happiness. The *alaya*-consciousness carries the karmic tendencies that form our destiny. At the time of death, the *alaya*-consciousness recedes into a state of latency and moves our lives toward the next phase of existence. If it is storing karma that inclines us toward suffering, the experience of suffering continues after death and into the next life. If, however, the karmic seeds in the *alaya*-consciousness have been purified and redirected toward happiness, our lives will instead be turned toward happiness and good fortune.

Our natural response to unhappiness is to try to change our circumstances. However, if our karmic reality has not been transformed, no amount of good circumstances can create anything other than temporary relative happiness. And relative happiness won't "stick," because we cannot preserve good circumstances through life's endless changes; nor can we take them beyond this existence. Only by changing our inner condition of life, which travels with us through life and death, can lasting happiness be achieved. And it is only while we are living in the world that we can make this transformation.

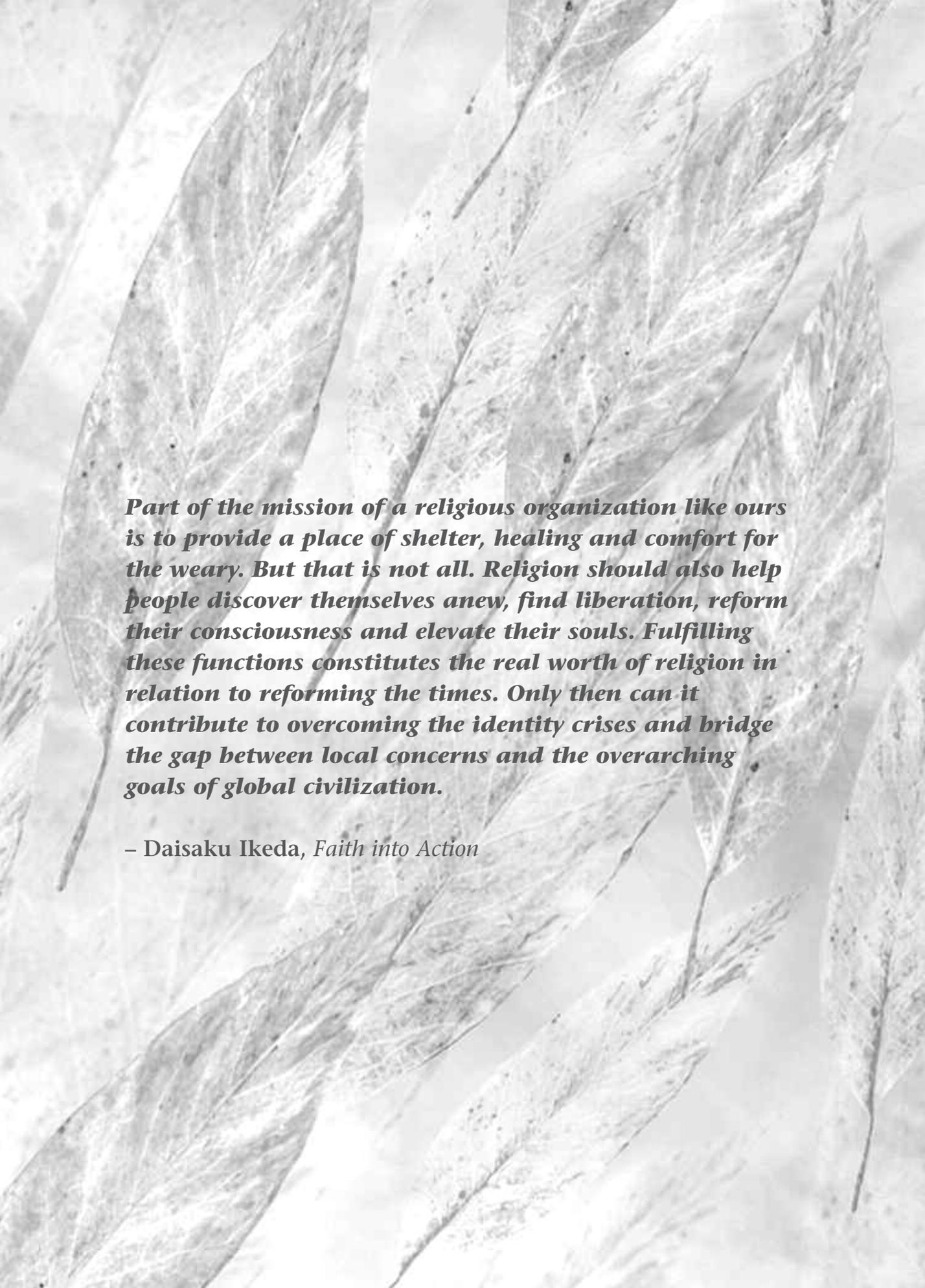
There is an even deeper level of consciousness, called the ninth, or *amala*-consciousness. The ninth consciousness is “the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life’s functions,” or the Buddha nature. It is free from all karmic impediments and exists within our own bodies and minds, as well as throughout the universe. Chanting *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* (the name of the Buddha nature) triggers the release of that Buddha nature—we “call its name” to summon it forth from the depths of our lives. The pure life force of the universe is thus able to travel through the *alaya*-consciousness, like a torrent of clear water, cleansing our negative karma. Every fibre of our being is then imbued with this life force and wisdom, and negative effects from causes made even throughout countless lifetimes are changed and oriented toward Buddhahood.

This process of changing karma naturally involves facing the realities of our past karma, which appear in the form of difficulties and limitations we experience. But because it

arises from the ninth consciousness, which “reigns over all of life’s functions,” our emerging Buddha nature has the power to cause such profound change to occur. In this way, we can challenge and use our problems as the means for cultivating our enlightened, original selves. Buddhism thus recognizes all people as “Buddhas-in-the-making.”

The experiences of SGI members throughout the world attest to this remarkable truth. By tenaciously practising *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* against what often seemed like impossible odds, millions of individuals have turned an existence of despair and anger into an energetic and meaningful life filled with optimism. Life then becomes something more than a struggle against pain, as it begins to move into the realm of expanded possibilities. Abilities never imagined blossom, and creativity and joy become a way of life rather than a faraway dream.





Part of the mission of a religious organization like ours is to provide a place of shelter, healing and comfort for the weary. But that is not all. Religion should also help people discover themselves anew, find liberation, reform their consciousness and elevate their souls. Fulfilling these functions constitutes the real worth of religion in relation to reforming the times. Only then can it contribute to overcoming the identity crises and bridge the gap between local concerns and the overarching goals of global civilization.

– Daisaku Ikeda, Faith into Action

6. SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL

WHAT IS THE SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL?

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a worldwide association of 12 million members in nearly 200 countries and territories. The world *soka* means “creating value,” and *gakkai* means “society.” Soka Gakkai therefore means “Society for the Creation of Value.” The SGI centres its activities on developing the human potential for individual happiness and for creating global peace and prosperity.

Rooted in the life-affirming Buddhist philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin, the members of the SGI share a profound commitment to the values of peace, culture and education. These three ideals correspond to the “three virtues” that describe a Buddha: those of sovereign, parent and teacher to humankind. The virtue of sovereign is the concern for the protection and welfare of all people (peace). The virtue of parent is the fostering of the capacity to care for others (culture). And the virtue of teacher is the ability to awaken others to truth and their higher potential (education).

The scope and nature of activities conducted in each country differ according to the culture and characteristics of that society, with the shared understanding of the link

between individual happiness and the peace and prosperity of society.

The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin places the highest emphasis on the sanctity of life. Members seek through their practice of Buddhism to develop and enhance their ability to live with confidence, to create value in any circumstance, and to contribute to the well-being of their families, their friends and their communities. This self-directed transformation of the individual is referred to as the process of “human revolution.” Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings assert that all people, regardless of social or personal circumstances, possess the potential to develop lives of value and creativity—to attain an enlightened state of life. Buddhism further teaches that, in the final analysis, lasting peace can only be achieved when we challenge and master the impulses toward hatred and violence that exist within us all—what Buddhism calls the “fundamental darkness” of life, or the three poisons of anger, greed and foolishness. Peace, culture and education are the respective antidotes to these three poisons. It is this dynamic process of self-reformation and the resultant rejuvenation of human society that form the core of the SGI’s vision of a peaceful world.

These values are expressed in the SGI Charter, which embodies core beliefs in the



Tsunesaburo Makiguchi

Josei Toda

Daisaku Ikeda

ideal of world citizenship, the spirit of tolerance, and the safeguarding of fundamental human rights.

PEACE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION

The ideal of peace to which SGI members are dedicated is not merely the absence of war or armed conflict. It is a dynamic, interactive process, focusing on the individual and radiating out to family, community and society as a whole. This ideal of peace is a condition in which the dignity of life and the fundamental rights of all people are respected and fully secured. The SGI's efforts are directed at calling on the human capacity for creativity as a response to the human tendency toward destruction.

One way of helping people to appreciate the dignity of their lives is to bring them into contact with their humanity through culture. Culture can link the hearts of people throughout the world by inspiring our sense of beauty and goodness. Cultural exchange nurtures understanding and respect among different peoples, promoting the spirit of coexistence and mutual appreciation. The SGI encourages each individual to discover and develop his or her own unique qualities and abilities, and also provides opportunities for cultures to share and appreciate those of others, through the promotion of various cultural activities. The world's vast and diverse stores of cultural riches thus become more accessible to people in general.

An involvement with education is one of the organization's enduring features.

Humanistic learning opens the way to healing wounds of the past and building forward-looking societies. Such an approach counters bigotry and other forms of parochialism, and encourages a universal sense of humanity—both part of the Buddhist view of life.

The SGI has continued to regard education as a lifelong pursuit of self-awareness and development. Education nurtures the ability to think critically, make informed choices, and appreciate life in all its diversity. In its appeal for the development of the whole human being, the SGI strives to create educational opportunities for citizens of all ages and backgrounds through discussion forums, seminars, exhibitions and cultural exchanges.

HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT

The Soka Gakkai International was formed in 1975. In the years since, as the SGI community continued to expand in various countries, national organizations have been established in every region of the world. Developing their own programs of activities in accordance with the culture and characteristics of their respective societies, these independent organizations now comprise the international community of the SGI.

The Soka Gakkai began in 1930 as an educators' group, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Society of Educators for the Creation of Value). The founder of the group, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871-1944), an educator and

author, was passionately dedicated to reforming the Japanese educational system, which emphasized rote learning over critical, independent thinking. He strove to develop modes of education that would unleash the potential of the individual.

Central to Makiguchi's philosophy was his theory of value, the view that the creation of value is a uniquely human activity, and in fact constitutes the essence of being human. His quest to understand the meaning of human life led to his encounter with the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. After studying Nichiren Daishonin's philosophy, he realized that these teachings contain the spiritual underpinnings for the kind of value-creating education that had been his lifelong goal.

In 1928, Makiguchi committed himself to practising this Buddhism, along with a young teacher, Josei Toda (1900–58), whom he had met around 1920. Makiguchi, with Toda's assistance, subsequently founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, which drew its initial membership principally from among fellow educators and focused on the interface between Buddhist principles and Makiguchi's theory of value creation.

Japan at that time was plunging headlong into war and destruction, a course that was diametrically opposed to the Buddhist reverence for life. As the Second World War escalated, the militarist government began to crack down severely on all forms of dissidence. Makiguchi and Toda found themselves under increasing pressure to compromise their beliefs and lend support to the war effort. Their continued resistance led to their arrest and imprisonment in 1943 as "thought criminals," along with other leaders of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai.

Makiguchi endured brutality and privation in prison, refusing on all counts to compromise his convictions. The records of his interrogations reveal a man propounding, without a trace of hesitation or fear, the very thoughts that had led to his incarceration. On November 18, 1944, he died at the age of 73 in the Tokyo Detention House.

Of the other leaders arrested, only Toda stood up to the authorities with Makiguchi,

and refused to recant his beliefs. He therefore remained in prison while the others were released. Toda survived the ordeal of imprisonment and was released on July 3, 1945, just weeks before Japan's surrender. The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai had all but disintegrated under the wartime persecutions. Although physically ravaged by his two years in prison, Toda immediately set about the task of rebuilding the organization. It was renamed the Soka Gakkai (Society for the Creation of Value), reflecting Toda's resolve that its mission should not be confined to the field of education but be expanded to the betterment of society as a whole. The Soka Gakkai grew rapidly under Toda's leadership. By the time of his passing in 1958, the membership had grown to more than 750,000 families.

Josei Toda's responsibilities were assumed by Daisaku Ikeda, who became the third president of the Soka Gakkai on May 3, 1960. Ikeda met Josei Toda at the age of 19 and practised under his direct tutelage until Toda's death. Ikeda has continuously dedicated himself to fulfilling the vision his mentor shared with him in the areas of peace, culture and education.

In 1957, Josei Toda issued a declaration against the use of nuclear weapons, declaring their use to be criminal under any circumstances. He called upon the youth of the world to work for the abolition of these weapons of mass destruction. Taking up this challenge, Daisaku Ikeda has devoted more than 50 years to creating conditions for a peaceful world. He has held more than 1,500 dialogues with leading cultural, political and academic figures on topics ranging from peace, human rights and the role of religion in society, to astronomy and the power of culture. Many of these dialogues have been published in a number of languages. Mr. Ikeda has lectured on peace issues at universities throughout the world, and has made an annual peace proposal every year since 1983 on January 26, the anniversary of the founding of the SGI. These lectures and peace proposals have addressed subjects such as global citizenship, individual self-mastery, and the power of dialogue and tolerance. His efforts have been recognized

by the United Nations, which presented him with the UN Peace Award, and by universities throughout the world, from whom he has received more than 140 honorary doctorates and professorships.

Mr. Ikeda's efforts to fulfill Josei Toda's vision of a peaceful world have also inspired the SGI's wide-ranging activities as a non-governmental organization (NGO) with official ties to the United Nations, and as a member organization of the World Federation of United Nations Associations. Mr. Ikeda is an honorary adviser to this body. Central to these activities have been public information programs that aim, through exhibitions, symposia and other forums, to promote awareness of the issues of war and peace and the feasibility of peaceful alternatives. Major international exhibitions on such themes as disarmament, human rights and environmental protection have been presented, with the goal of enhancing public awareness of these critical issues.

The SGI has become increasingly active in interfaith dialogue and has developed partnerships at different levels with many institutions and NGOs. The SGI is a movement that demonstrates how Buddhism can be a positive, regenerative force in society. Rather than detaching themselves from the problems of the world, SGI members take the attitude of facing challenges to bring about positive change.

The SGI president has also founded several institutions dedicated to peace and inter-cultural dialogue. The Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research conducts independent research and networks with peace researchers, activists and policy-makers to provide a global forum for the discussion and implementation of cooperatively designed policy strategies. The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century provides a venue for pooling wisdom and fostering dialogue among the world's peace-oriented cultural, philosophical and religious traditions. Thus, a network of global citizens in the pursuit of peace is being created.

The SGI promotes cross-cultural exchange, based on the conviction that music, art and other cultural expressions enhance the richness of human life and can inspire mutual



Daisaku Ikeda with British historian Dr. Arnold Toynbee (1972). Their discussions were published in a book titled *Choose Life*.

respect and understanding in our diverse world. In 1963, Mr. Ikeda founded the Min-On Concert Association, which has sponsored tours of musical and performing groups from some 70 countries, including Canada, and has grown into the largest Japanese organization of its kind. He also founded the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in 1983, which is engaged in a wide-reaching program of exchange with cultural institutions throughout the world.

Education has been of central concern to the Soka Gakkai since its inception, and many of the ideas set forth by Makiguchi and Toda have been brought to fruition through the creation of the Soka school system. Comprising all levels from pre-school to post-graduate in Japan, the Soka school system undertakes education designed to stimulate wisdom and responsible involvement in society. In recent years, Soka Kindergartens have been opened in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia. Soka University of America has two campuses established in the United States, and Makiguchi's value-creating education system has been adopted by more than 50 schools throughout Brazil.

SGI CANADA

Immediately on becoming president, Daisaku Ikeda began to devote his efforts and attention to the small but growing international membership. He visited the United States, with a brief stopover in Canada, and Brazil, in October 1960 to encourage the small number

of members practising there, and has subsequently travelled to more than 50 countries. In January 1975, the Soka Gakkai International was created, with Daisaku Ikeda as its first president.

The seeds of the present Canadian organization, SGI Canada, were sown during Mr. Ikeda's first overseas trip. On his arrival for a two-day stopover in Toronto, Mr. Ikeda was met at the airport by a young expectant mother, Akiko (Elizabeth) Izumi, who had herself recently moved to Canada with her Canadian-born husband.

Since there were no members in Toronto at the time, Mrs. Izumi's mother, who was a member in Japan, asked her daughter to welcome Mr. Ikeda at the airport. Having met the Soka Gakkai president, Mrs. Izumi was moved by his warmth and consideration, and two years later decided to join the Soka Gakkai.

Gradually, a handful of members emigrated from Japan and settled in such places as Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, Vancouver, Calgary and Winnipeg. They introduced others and formed small groups. In the early years, these pioneer members were part of the larger American organization; in 1976 the Canadian organization

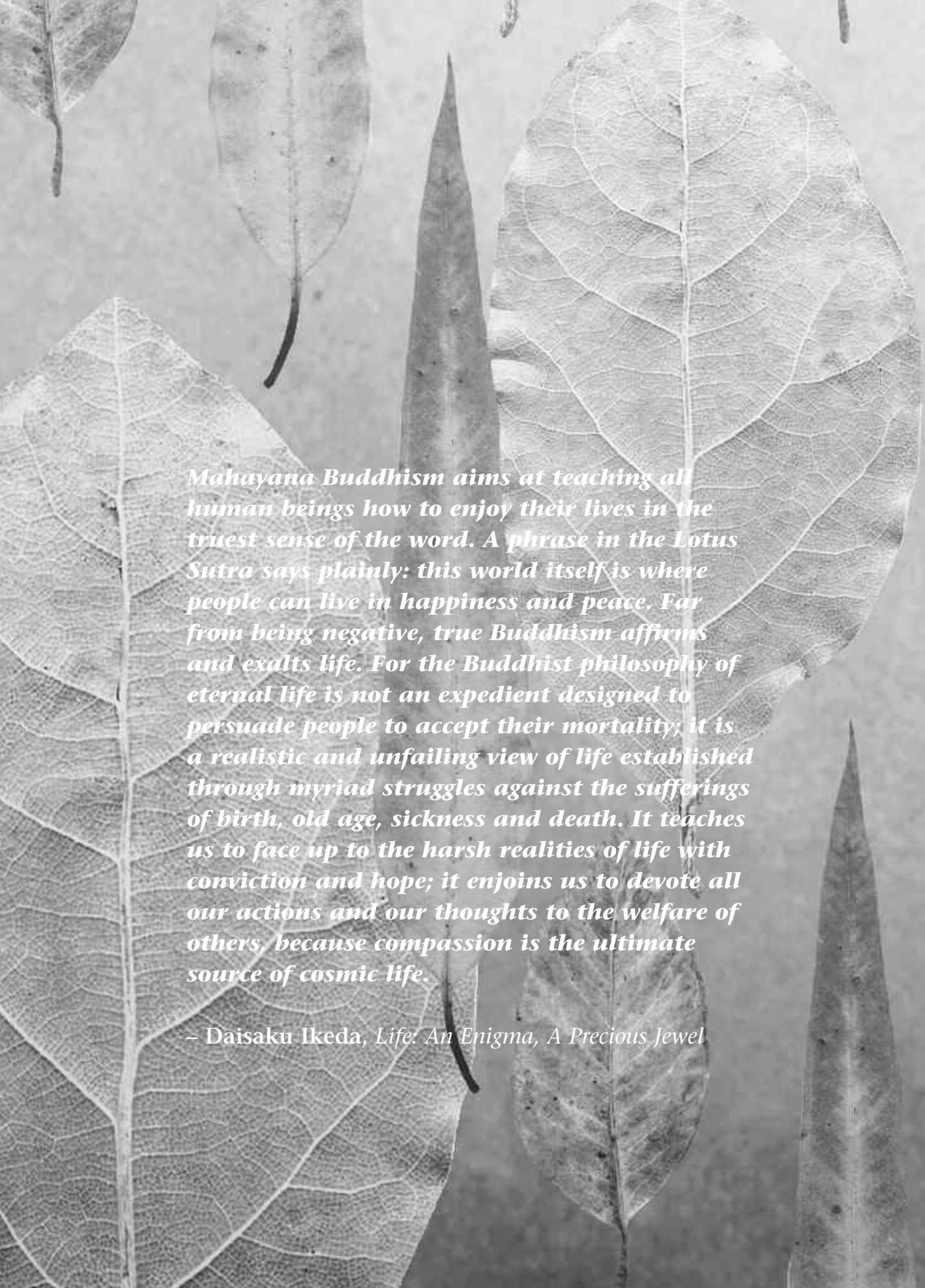
was established and Mrs. Izumi was appointed as its first chairperson. Centres were opened in Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver as the membership steadily grew. Today there are members across Canada, with additional centres or offices in Ottawa, Quebec City, Edmonton, Calgary and Winnipeg. In 1996, a conference centre was established in Caledon, Ontario, called the SGI Canada Caledon Centre for Culture and Education.

A national monthly magazine, *New Century*, was launched in 1981, followed in 1986 by a French language publication, *Ère Nouvelle*. Local organizations of SGI Canada can be found in every province.

SGI Canada is registered as a religious non-profit charitable organization and its membership represents a cross-section of Canadian society, composed of people of all ages and cultures. This is a natural reflection of the universal appeal of the Buddhist philosophy, which places the highest value on the dignity of human life, while at the same time celebrating and encouraging diversity and individual freedom.



SGI Youth representatives from around the world in Japan (2002)



Mahayana Buddhism aims at teaching all human beings how to enjoy their lives in the truest sense of the word. A phrase in the Lotus Sutra says plainly: this world itself is where people can live in happiness and peace. Far from being negative, true Buddhism affirms and exalts life. For the Buddhist philosophy of eternal life is not an expedient designed to persuade people to accept their mortality; it is a realistic and unfailing view of life established through myriad struggles against the sufferings of birth, old age, sickness and death. It teaches us to face up to the harsh realities of life with conviction and hope; it enjoins us to devote all our actions and our thoughts to the welfare of others, because compassion is the ultimate source of cosmic life.

*– Daisaku Ikeda, *Life: An Enigma, A Precious Jewel**

7. Q & A

Some Questions and Answers about SGI and Nichiren Buddhism

Why would I need a practice like this?

The world rushes at us. Our minds are often left reeling from the events of the day. We are also strongly influenced by the inclination of our own character, and by the countless experiences that have helped to form our character and circumstances, which is known in Buddhism as karma. Although it is difficult to reach beneath the surface of experience, deep within us is a fount of unlimited joy and strength, our own eternal and unchanging self in the midst of an ever-changing world. We can tap this resource through the practice of this Buddhism. SGI President Daisaku Ikeda explains, "Faith is the function of human life to dispel the dark clouds of doubt, anxiety and regret and sincerely open and direct one's heart toward something great."

The answers to the most important questions about life and death, suffering and happiness, are not to be found in the external world; nor can technology provide the answers. They lie within the depths of our own consciousness, and only when we awaken that deepest level of our consciousness can we experience the essential nature of our lives. This is not an abstract intellectual process. It is an actual sensation of positive physical and spiritual energy, and a transformation of how we perceive life that occurs when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

What are the benefits of this practice?

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo enables us to open our inner lives, discovering who we really are and what great untapped potential we possess. Initial experiences include a pronounced feeling of spiritual and physical rejuvenation and a heightened level of perception and clarity of mind. We may also experience a release of intense emotions, which might have been long suppressed.

To explain, we might think of our lives like a glass of water that contains sediment on the bottom, which is not recognized until it is stirred up. This sediment is like the negativity in our lives, which is there but is not apparent as long as it is left undisturbed. This negativity nonetheless adversely affects our lives and colours our perceptions. The goal of Buddhist practice is to purify our lives by removing the impurities of our negative karma. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like adding fresh, clean water to this glass. At first, it causes the sediment to be agitated, making the water appear cloudy.

However, as we continue practising, the clean water gradually displaces the sediment and purifies the water in the glass. It is therefore important to continue to supply this clean water to the glass, which means continuing to practise and study. Nichiren Daishonin states, "Buddhahood lies in continuing faith." Faith in Buddhism means exercising the will to practise and study. Inner



emotional, psychological and physical. In concrete terms, we experience:

- Positive changes to longstanding or seemingly insurmountable difficulties
- Happier and more harmonious relations with others
- An increased capacity for self-reflection and improvement
- A clear and peaceful mind, combined with a powerful inner resolve
- A sense of hopefulness and forward-looking self-reliance
- Improved physical, mental and emotional condition
- Greater compassion for and appreciation of others
- The ability to transform difficulties into opportunities for growth
- A heightened level of perception
- Enhanced ability to achieve goals

The ultimate benefits of practising this Buddhism are extraordinary. The condition of life called enlightenment or Buddhahood is like a doorway to the infinite. It is the quintessence of human experience and literally defies description. However, as soon as one begins chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, this doorway begins to open and the many beneficial results are indications of what lies ahead as one's practice develops over time.

How can I find out more about this practice?

Most people begin by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo on a trial basis and attending SGI meetings. Chanting can be done at any time of the day, although it is usually done in the morning and the evening. Attending discussion and study meetings, you can become acquainted with members, who can help answer your questions and teach you how to chant. If there is an SGI Canada centre in your city, there are regular introductory sessions, which are free of charge, as are all our activities and programs. If there isn't a centre where you live, you can contact us at our national office, at the centre nearest you, or through the postmaster at our Web site.

PHOTO: SIMON TANENBAUM

peace, renewal and the light of a powerful resolve replace feelings of lethargy, pain, anger or hopelessness. Through the course of our lives we tend to lose contact with our inner light, allowing disappointment, disillusionment and the pain of bitter experiences to lead us to resignation and, in many cases, cynicism or depression. The practice of Buddhism is a battle of light over darkness. It is the unleashing of positive energy that has lain dormant, like an undiscovered treasure. Once awakened, the Buddha nature makes itself felt on every level—spiritual,

Why do members talk to others about the practice of Buddhism?

The primary purpose of this philosophy is to become happy in the deepest sense of the word. The most obvious reason for teaching others about this philosophy is to share its benefits, which is an expression of compassion. By trying to help others find happiness through this practice, we also open up the capacity of our lives to appreciate others and to feel joy when they triumph in their own lives. In this sense, our happiness is directly proportional to our humanity, and is linked to the happiness of others.

Can't I be happy without chanting?

That depends on one's definition of happiness. Most of us are happy when things are going well, but it is much more difficult to develop happiness in trying circumstances. Like the lotus flower, those who practise Nam-myoho-renge-kyo bloom most fully in the deepest, darkest swamp—the problems of our lives. "Relative" happiness depends on having good circumstances, and is easily upset when those circumstances change. Being able to actually transform the way we feel at this present moment, regardless of our circumstances, is not easy. "Absolute" happiness, on the other hand, is the result of the emergence of the Buddha nature, the original state of life that is completely pure, natural and unaffected by negative influences. The practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo turns even the most adverse conditions into the fuel for "changing poison into medicine." All experiences, both good and bad, become means to create value, and ultimately lead to victory in life. Buddhist practice thus amplifies the power of the human spirit to heights never before experienced.

How do you define "suffering"?

When we examine this issue carefully, we can trace all forms of human suffering to various fears—fear of failure, fear of physical and emotional pain, fear of loss, fear of the unknown, and so on. In the end, our two greatest fears are the fear of death and the fear of being alone and separated from

everything we hold dear. We suffer because we cannot perceive the eternity of life and the reality that we are connected to everyone and everything in the universe.

The practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism causes the awakening of a growing sense of the eternity of our lives and of the oneness of all life. As our practice progresses, this feeling becomes clearer and stronger; and as it does, these primal fears begin to dissolve. We find that this conviction becomes a living reality that we can call forth at will whenever we chant, engage in dialogue with others, or study the teachings. Like a skilled navigator in a powerful vessel, we can travel over the waves of life with perfect composure and a clear sense of direction, setting our sights on an ever-widening horizon of possibilities that extend even beyond our present existence.

How does this practice work?

We bring a lot to our present moment: emotions, thoughts and bodily sensations. Changes to any one of these areas produce changes in the other two areas. To really become happy, we need a practice that will enable us to sculpt our "life-moment" and to expand our "life-space."

Nichiren Daishonin, who founded this Buddhism, said that we are no more able to see our own life condition than we are able to see our own eyelashes without a mirror. The Gohonzon is the scroll, called a mandala, which we face and focus on when we chant. This Gohonzon embodies the life-condition of the Buddha, in which life is perfectly in balance. In the centre is inscribed "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (Buddhahood), which illuminates all the other conditions of life depicted on either side of this central inscription. Chanting to the Gohonzon is like opening our eyes to a mirror of our own Buddha nature, stimulating the confidence and joy to face and overcome any situation. Over time we develop an understanding of the meaning of our lives in our own terms.

Every person's life has a pattern of joy and pain that is unique to that individual. Events and influences from our past, as well as our own personalities, have helped to shape our tendencies as we interact with our



world. This is part of the law of cause and effect. In this sense, many causes have gone into creating the effect—that being ourselves, as we are now. Yet throughout the continuum of time, we exist only now, so changes that we make in this moment can have a profound effect on how we experience life and how our world responds to us. However, to make a profound change requires an equally powerful cause. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo awakens the universal rhythm within our lives, creating dramatic effects that are experienced both inside of us and in our environment. It is an interior journey by which we reclaim all that is wonderful about ourselves. But it can only be truly understood through direct experience.

How can one person create world peace?

When we are advancing joyfully and appreciate all those around us, our families, our colleagues and the people in our communities respond in ways that create harmony and joy in our immediate environment. Even one deeply determined

person can have a profound effect on the world. From this microcosm of individual peace is born the lasting and true peace that humanity has so desperately longed for throughout the ages. The model for world peace that Buddhism provides must begin with oneself and one's immediate sphere of existence; from there it radiates outward and links with others. If we can create peace right where we are now, we open the possibilities for others through our example. Although this way may seem indirect, it actually represents a major accomplishment.

What are the people like?

The membership of SGI Canada is representative of the Canadian population in terms of racial and cultural background, gender, age, financial situation, etc. A true grassroots organization, the SGI is a gathering of ordinary people who recognize the extraordinary potential of every individual.

What is the relationship of the members to the organization and to each other?

Members offer their homes for meetings for discussion and study. In these meetings, members are supportive and encourage each other in their practice. They share their personal experiences and learn from each other how to deepen their understanding of Buddhism and how to apply the philosophy in their daily lives. Leaders are fellow members with longer experience of the practice who provide insight and encouragement. They do not give members advice on how they should live their lives, but rather help their fellow members understand the philosophy more clearly so they will be better able to develop their practice.

What does it cost?

There is no cost, other than a nominal donation when a person receives the Gohonzon. Most members have their own Gohonzon to use at home for their Buddhist practice. There are no membership dues or other financial obligations. The organization exists to serve and support the members, not the other way around. We do not sell courses, nor do we solicit funds outside our own membership.

Do I need to become a member in order to attend SGI meetings?

Guests, family and friends are always welcome at our meetings. The decision to become a member is an individual choice that comes naturally when one has decided to take up the practice and wants to make a commitment to continue. Some people attend meetings for months or even years before coming to that point, and some attend simply out of interest. Everyone is welcome, and there is no pressure to join. Our meetings are meant to be a place where people can freely enjoy an atmosphere of friendship, learn from the philosophy, and also learn from each other.

How is the organization funded?

Members voluntarily contribute, as with any non-profit organization. However, donations are not a requirement of membership, and are used exclusively for the development of the SGI organization's activities and programs as well as for the maintenance of its centres. The umbrella organization, the Soka Gakkai International, fosters and occasionally sponsors events and programs for promoting peace, culture and education. These events are supplementary to SGI Canada's regular activities. Any fundraising activities undertaken for special projects, such as disaster relief, are carried out separately, and are usually directed to other non-profit agencies such as UNHCR, UNICEF or similar organizations.

What is the best way to approach this practice as a beginner?

The best way is to try chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo for a few minutes every day. Sitting upright with your back straight, press your palms together lightly in front of your chest and pronounce "Nam-myoho-enge-kyo" in a steady rhythmical voice. The words "myo" and "kyo" are pronounced like "yo" with the consonant in front. Each syllable has one beat: Nam-myoh-ren-ge-kyo. SGI members can help you to chant correctly. An audio sample can be accessed from SGI Canada's Web site at www.sgicanada.org to help you learn the pronunciation. It is also a good idea to attend discussion and study meetings so you can learn to practise through personal contact

with other people who are practising. This is also very valuable in helping to answer questions and becoming familiar with the philosophy. Lending this kind of support is really the main purpose of the SGI organization. However, you will be encouraged to progress at your own speed and gain your own first-hand experience with the practice.

What is gongyo?

The word *gongyo* literally means "assiduous practice." It is the term used for the twice-daily practice of reciting two portions from the Lotus Sutra and chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo (called daimoku). The sections recited from the Lotus Sutra are from the second and the 16th chapters, called respectively, the "Expedient Means" chapter and the "Life Span" chapter. Nichiren Daishonin specified reciting portions of these two chapters because they are the most important, in that they elucidate the universally and eternally inherent Buddha nature. SGI members recite the sutra and chant daimoku in the morning and the evening as their daily practice.

Why chant words in a language I don't understand?

We are able to study the meaning of the sutra, which is readily accessible. In addition, people from all over the world can chant together and thereby unite their spirits, transcending language barriers. If everyone were to chant in their own languages, people from different countries could not chant together. And most important of all, when we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we are communicating with the inner depths of our consciousness. Although Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is a Japanese pronunciation of a Chinese translation of Sanskrit, it is a "name" that embodies the essence it stands for—just as our own names embody who we are. We are all made of the same materials; all the elements that have made up the stars and planets are also the same physical elements of our bodies. Likewise, we share a spiritual link with everything in the universe through time and space, including the mind of the Buddha. When we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and recite the sutra, we are generating

this link with the Buddha consciousness within ourselves. In this sense, we “recognize” Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, just as we recognize our name when we are called.

SGI President Ikeda explains further in one of his lectures:

Some of you, I imagine, may wonder how reading sutra passages you cannot understand could bring about any benefit. Let me reassure you that definitely there is benefit from carrying out this practice.

The Daishonin says:

“A baby does not know the difference between water and fire, and cannot distinguish medicine from poison. But when the baby sucks milk, its life is nourished and sustained. Although one may not be versed [in various sutras]...if one listens to even one character or one phrase of the Lotus Sutra, one cannot fail to attain Buddhahood.” (*Writings*, p. 513)

Just as a baby is nourished and grows naturally of its own accord by drinking milk, if you earnestly chant the Mystic Law with faith in the Gohonzon, definitely your life will come to shine with immeasurable good fortune and benefit.

To cite another example: Dogs have a language in the world of dogs, and birds have a language in the world of birds. While people cannot understand these languages, fellow dogs and fellow birds can certainly communicate within their own species. Also, even though some people do not understand scientific jargon or a particular language, others can communicate very well through these languages.

Similarly, it might be said that when we are doing gongyo or chanting daimoku, we are speaking in the language of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Even though you may not understand what you are saying,

your voice definitely reaches the Gohonzon, all Buddhist gods [positive and protective forces in the environment] and all Buddhas and bodhisattvas over the three existences and in the ten directions; and that, in response, the entire universe bathes you in the light of good fortune.

At the same time, it is certainly true that if you study the meaning of the sutra based on this practice and with a seeking mind, you can as a matter of course deepen your confidence and strengthen your faith still further. (*Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, Vol. 1, pp. 20–21)

What is the difference between chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo and meditation?

Chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is an all-inclusive practice. It combines prayer, meditation and recitation together, and generates an integration of our inner selves with the outer world. It differs from meditation in that we don’t close our eyes and withdraw from the outside environment. Instead, we keep our eyes open and focused on the Gohonzon while we are chanting. In traditional forms of meditation, the practitioner seeks to enter into a state that is primarily an interior experience. After emerging from this experience, the person must re-integrate with the outside world. One must clear one’s mind of all thoughts and essentially wait for something to happen. When we chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, on the other hand, we remain in a fully conscious state and we experience the welling up of the Buddha nature from within. Through the active engagement of our prayers, like a powerful light from the deepest level of our consciousness, it penetrates and infuses our minds and bodies simultaneously with this surge of positive energy, clarity and a deep sense of being connected to life and the world. We experience this in the context of our conscious reality and the world around us

because the Buddha nature is life itself, not something beneath or beyond life.

Instead of attempting to extinguish desires and enter a state of emptiness, Nichiren Daishonin teaches that both desires and problems motivate us to live and to improve our lives. When our desires are linked to Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they stimulate the emergence of the Buddha nature. By embracing the realities of daily life and applying the practice of chanting to them, we generate the wisdom and inner strength of the Buddha nature. We gain the spiritual capacity to feel greater compassion, and our desires expand and become more altruistic. In this way, we purify and elevate our desires rather than try to suppress them.

What should I think about when I'm chanting?

The effect of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is to bring all aspects of our being into

balance and harmony. Because the approach is all-embracing and integrated, the effect is likewise balanced and natural. If you feel tired, chanting will help give you energy. If you are overwrought, chanting will help you feel calm. Therefore, it is best to focus your mind on whatever is most important to you in your own life. In this way, you can make the most natural connection with the practice and also see it work in the areas of your life that matter most to you. Our needs and aspirations, as well as our worries and fears—all are the passageways to our Buddha wisdom. This is the compassionate and humanistic approach of the Buddhist philosophy. When we unlock and release the power and wisdom within, we can begin to build a solid foundation for peace and happiness that originates from the depths of our own lives.





Buddhism...explores the “internal cosmos” unfolding within the lives of human beings, reaching even to the great life that is the origin of the universe. This life that is as vast as the universe is the wellspring that gives birth to the external cosmos. And the bodhisattva way taught in Buddhism will encourage groups of human beings who live with the life of the greater universe as their greater self to rise up from among the people. Here becomes possible the formation of the free and richly compassionate bodhisattva character that, basing itself on the fundamental life of the universe, with Earth as its stage, is able to achieve solidarity with others. It is these bodhisattva-like individuals, I believe, who will be the world citizens endowed with a worldview and a sense of ethics appropriate to taking responsibility for a global community.

– Daisaku Ikeda, *Space and Eternal Life*

CONCLUSION

There is a story about Shakyamuni Buddha that recounts how one day he came upon a deer that had been shot with an arrow. A group of learned men were gathered there, each in turn speculating on where the deer's life would go when it died. When the Buddha appeared, they anticipated some profound words of wisdom. However, he said nothing but instead went straight to the deer and pulled the arrow from its body in order to save its life and end its suffering. This story illustrates the Buddha's original intention and the reason for the existence of Buddhism. The Buddha's quest was a life-or-death struggle to discover the meaning of life and how to conquer the four sufferings of birth, sickness, aging and death. The concluding words of the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra read:

At all times I think to myself:
How can I cause living beings
To gain entry into the unsurpassed way
And quickly acquire the body of a
Buddha?

(Lotus Sutra, chapter 16, p.232)

Nichiren Daishonin clarified the ultimate teaching, which is known variously as "the teaching affirmed by all Buddhas," "the one essential phrase," "the teaching that accords with the Buddha's mind" and "the doctrine of attaining Buddhahood in one's present form." He expressed it in one of his writings by saying, "The wonderful means of truly putting an end to the physical and spiritual obstacles of all living beings is none other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (*Writings*, p. 842).

