The first chapter of the essential teaching starts with the shocking events of the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Countless unknown figures, golden in hue, emerge forth from the dwelling in the empty space beneath the saha world. Each of these bodhisattvas is a leader of their great assembly and is markedly different from the previous bodhisattvas introduced in the theoretical teaching. They respond to Shakyamuni without instruction but act on their own accord with the Buddha’s intention engraved in their lives.

The members of the assembly cannot comprehend how these newly introduced bodhisattvas are standing before them. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth claim that they have been Shakyamuni’s disciples since the remote past. This was inconceivable for those that believed that Shakyamuni had attained enlightenment some 40 years prior, which raised the question of the identity of Shakyamuni before his enlightenment in India. “Upsetting attachments and arousing doubts,” Shakyamuni made his disciples put into question the meaning of his lifetime teaching by introducing the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.
This also sparks discussion between President Ikeda and the study leaders on meaning of the simultaneity of cause and effect and the history of the lotus symbol in Buddhism.

**Key Passages**

Key Passage #1

_The time after the Buddha’s passing means the ten thousand years and more of the Latter Day of the Law; that is, the eternal future. Pervading the Lotus Sutra is the Buddha’s immense sense of responsibility to lead all people in every age throughout eternity to happiness. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth embody this responsibility, compassion and wisdom. They are great benefactors who work to elevate the spiritual state of humankind. And we are at the forefront. This is truly amazing. Our mission is tremendous. (WLS-3, 196–97)_

- The Bodhisattvas of the Earth emerge with the mission to spread the Mystic Law in the period after Shakyamuni’s death.

Key Passage #2

_That’s right. And the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is in no way disorderly or confused. They are vital, energetic and free; but at the same time they are united and harmonious. In a sense, they are the image of an ideal organization..._
In praising these Buddhas with utmost respect, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are actually praising the eternal oneness of mentor and disciple. A Buddha lives each moment with the greatest sense of fulfillment, fully awakened to the truth that the present moment is itself eternity. The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are in fact also Buddhas whose lives are illuminated by the awareness that the present moment is one with eternity. This, in other words, is a meeting between Buddhas. Therefore it is joyful. Accordingly even fifty small kalpas does not seem like a long time.

Representing all the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the four great leaders—Superior Practices, Boundless Practices, Pure Practices and Firmly Established Practices—begin conversing with Shakyamuni about the great objective of leading all people to enlightenment. (WLS-3, 200–01)

- The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are united in spirit with each other. They are interconnected forming a strong basis for a harmonious group committed to their shared mission.
- The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are Buddhas like their mentor, connected in spirit and therefore truly open the world of the oneness of mentor and disciple.

Key Passage #3

Maitreya knew of Shakyamuni’s practices in his previous lives. What’s more, he was a person of great wisdom who had grasped the principle Shakyamuni revealed in the theoretical teaching that all people can attain Buddhahood.
But with the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, the very foundation of what Maitreya believed up to that time was demolished. “Just who is this person Shakyamuni that he is being reverently greeted by this multitude of great bodhisattvas?” he must have wondered. Seeing for himself these mysterious disciples from the remote past—the Bodhisattvas of the Earth—causes him to wonder, “What is the truth about my mentor?” “What is my mentor’s true identity?” In other words, the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth brings on a great transformation in how people view the Buddha...

This is the condition Shakyamuni describes in the “Life Span” chapter where he says that living beings “do not see me even when close by” (LSOC, 271). At the very least, Maitreya senses this and reflects what it means to live his life as a disciple of so great a Buddha.

An important aspect of the essential teaching is that it guides people to seek out their own inherent brilliance. The appearance of countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth in the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter points all people to the greatness of their lives. (WLS-3, 208)

- The revelation of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth caused Shakyamuni’s disciples to question the truth about their mentor’s identity. They were forced to reconcile with the eternity of the Buddha’s life.
- Questioning their understanding of their mentor opened a path for the disciples to develop a new understanding of their own brilliance.

Key Passage #4
His [Nichiren Daishonin’s] impact was not limited to the world of Buddhism. He also upset attachments and aroused doubts in the minds of those in power in the Kamakura government, those allied with the government, and in general throughout the populace.

He essentially refuted mistaken views of religion and faith that had prevailed up to that time. Beliefs about life, society and the people were entirely overturned. The strong reaction against the Daishonin was only natural. It is inconceivable that he could have avoided such difficulties. (WLS-3, 212)

- The practice of shakubuku could be considered an attempt to “upset attachments and arouse doubts” of people in society in order to help people reform the beliefs that caused people to suffer.

Key Passage #5

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

Bodhisattva is not a stage of completion (the effect of Buddhahood) but of incompleteness (the cause of Buddhahood). Bodhisattvas, while incomplete, display the state of completion (the effect of Buddhahood). Put another way, while partaking of a state of life of boundless joy and completion (the effect of Buddhahood), a bodhisattva at the same time...
takes action to advance, to ascend ever higher, and to lead still more people to enlightenment. In other words, it is a state of “incomplete completeness.”

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are eternal activists who base themselves on the Mystic Law; theirs are lives of eternal progress. Our summoning forth the boundless energy of these bodhisattvas constitutes the “emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth” within our own beings. When we do this, we can break through the shell of the lesser self that has constrained us. (WLS-3, 214–15)

- The Bodhisattvas of the Earth fundamentally share the same identity as Buddhas, like their mentor.
- The Bodhisattvas of the Earth outwardly exhibit the qualities of bodhisattvas, therefore seem to be in an incomplete state, still striving towards Buddhahood. Their identity, however, is fundamentally one of a Buddha and they display the qualities of its state in their activities and lives.

Key Passage #6

*Failing to comprehend the greatness of their own lives, people become attached to unimportant details. The power of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the essential power we human beings possess to break through all differences — ethnicity, race, gender or social standing — and lead people to happiness. We are ordinary people, plain and unadorned. We are*
thoroughly human and infinitely courageous. This is the pride of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is an earthshaking event attesting to the great underlying power of life. We have to convey this to people throughout the world. The essential teaching transforms how people perceive the Buddha, which amounts to a fundamental transformation in how people perceive themselves. (WLS-3, 216)

- While not discarding their humanity, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth overcome attachments to unimportant details in life to lead people to happiness.

Key Passage #7

The simultaneity of cause and effect is an extremely profound doctrine. I propose that we discuss it in detail another time.

For the time being, I’d just like to point out that the causality referred to here specifically indicates the causes and effects pertaining to the attainment of Buddahood. The state of Buddahood is the effect, and the practice to attain that state is the cause. The idea that these two could coincide seems counterintuitive; the usual assumption is that by carrying out Buddhist practice (the cause), a person later attains Buddahood (the effect).

But when we practice Nam-myoho-RENge-Kyo (the true cause for attaining Buddahood), our practice already encompasses the world of Buddahood (the true effect). Nam-myoho-RENge-Kyo is at once the true
cause and the true effect of attaining Buddhahood. This marvelous teaching of the Mystic Law embodying the simultaneity of cause and effect is compared to the lotus flower. The important point here is that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth manifest this simultaneity of cause and effect in their lives. (WLS-3, 227)

- Practicing Nam-myoho-rengy-kyo encompasses both the cause and the effect of Buddhahood and embodies the simultaneity of cause and effect, like the phenomena of the lotus flower seeding and blossoming at the same time.

Key Passage #8

The Lotus Sutra is the “seed” for attaining Buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra is great because it contains the seed of Buddhahood enabling all people to become Buddhas. This seed of Buddhahood is compared to a diamond; like a diamond, it cannot be damaged or broken. It will not be destroyed even if one should fall into the hell or any of the evil paths.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth have the virtue of never losing the seed of Buddhahood. That’s because, since the remote past, they have been inwardly embracing and outwardly practicing Nam-myoho-rengy-kyo, the seed of Buddhahood, which is the Lotus Sutra’s essence. (WLS-3, 232)

- The Bodhisattvas of the Earth never lose the seed for attaining Buddhahood. So long as they inwardly embrace and outwardly practice Nam-myoho-rengy-kyo, the seed of Buddhahood cannot be destroyed.
The Bodhisattvas of the Earth are the disciples from the remote past of the Buddha described in the “Life Span” chapter. These disciples from the remote past are born from the ultimate ground of existence. The “the utmost depth of the essential nature of phenomena” and “the ultimate of profound Buddhist principles,” of course, refer to the ultimate truth, or the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Based on that recognition, the statement in the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter that these bodhisattvas emerge from “the world of empty space underneath the saha world” (LSOC, 252–53) may reveal their origin in terms of space, while Shakyamuni’s remark that he has been teaching and converting them “ever since the long distant past” (LSOC, 261) may reveal their origin in terms of time.

The emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth is a great drama of life and the universe. It suggests that the ultimate Law contained in the depths of the essential teaching (second half) of the Lotus Sutra is the ultimate principle governing the universe. (WLS-3, 237)

- The Bodhisattvas of the Earth never lose the seed for attaining Buddhahood. So long as they inwardly embrace and outwardly practice Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the seed of Buddhahood cannot be destroyed.

Questions for Discussion
The questions below can be used during discussion sessions. They are intended to serve as example questions to generate faith-based discussion on the material covered.

1. How do we enact “upsetting attachments and arousing doubts” when sharing Buddhism with others?

2. President Ikeda says, “In praising these Buddhas with utmost respect, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are actually praising the eternal oneness of mentor and disciple” (WLS-3, 201). How are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth proof of greatness of the mentor?

3. President Ikeda says, “His impact was not limited to the world of Buddhism. He also upset attachments and aroused doubts in the minds of those in power in the Kamakura government, those allied with the government, and in general throughout the populace” (WLS-3, 212). How do our efforts to propagate Buddhism affecting more than “just the realm of Buddhism”?

4. How is the simultaneity of cause and effect expressed in our everyday lives as Bodhisattvas of the Earth?

5. What does it mean that Bodhisattvas of the Earth to never lose the seed of Buddhahood?