**THE SPIRIT OF DISCUSSION MEETINGS**

Our discussion meetings, humble as they may at times seem, take on profound significance as present-day manifestations of the Ceremony in the Air.

Every week, districts throughout the country host chanting sessions for the unity of the district and to call forth many more Bodhisattvas of the Earth. When the members chant, they do so envisioning each Nam-myoho-renge-kyo penetrating the entire community, spreading ripples of harmony throughout their city.

In the Lotus Sutra, countless Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions assemble around Shakya-muni Buddha and Many Treasures Buddha at the Ceremony in the Air. Their ultimate aim: “To provide a way for all of us living beings to attain Buddhahood” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 386).

In the same way, SGI President Ikeda has referred to SGI members as the harmonious community of believers, the network of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who have inherited Nichiren Daishonin’s vow to propagate the Mystic Law and lead all people to enlightenment. As such, our discussion meetings, humble as they may at times seem, take on profound significance as present-day manifestations of the Ceremony in the Air (see *The World of Nichiren Daishonin’s Writings*, vol. 4, p. 157).

President Ikeda elaborates: “These meeting places—where members seek Buddhism, share stories of gaining benefit and rededicate themselves in faith—are contemporary equivalents of Eagle Peak and the Ceremony in the Air depicted in the Lotus Sutra. These meeting places can be likened to the treasure lands referred to in the sutra, where people go to revitalize their lives (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 21, p. 203).

The district is the place where comrades in faith rally together and reconfirm their mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth to advance kosen-rufu. When we come together in friendship, study Nichiren Daishonin’s writings and President Ikeda’s encouragement, brimming with joy and seeking spirit, our meetings become “the assembly on Holy Eagle Peak which continues in solemn state and has not yet disbanded” (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 135).

This rhythm of gathering and parting—of coming together in the district and affirming our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and returning to our lives and society to demonstrate the principles of Soka humanism—serves as the dynamic engine propelling the American kosen-rufu movement forward.

With great pride and a renewed sense of mission, let’s hold discussion meetings that illustrate their great significance.
My youthful struggle of human revolution began from a discussion meeting—the meeting where I first met my mentor, second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda, and learned from him the correct way of life.

Since then, wherever I have gone and whatever the times, discussion meetings have been the starting point for embarking on new challenges in the kosen-rufu movement together with my fellow members.

I am delighted to see the inspiring chain reaction of human revolution that continues to arise and spread today from discussion meetings around the world.

In the Lotus Sutra, Shakya-muni declares his hope “to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us” (The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras, p. 70). In other words, he wishes to elevate all people to the same life state of Buddhahood that he has attained.

Discussion meetings are unsurpassed gatherings where this great wish of the Buddha comes to life. At discussion meetings, everyone plays a starring role. Discussion meetings brim with prayers and encouragement, equal to those of the Buddha, so that each and every participant can move forward happily, in high spirits and with bright smiles.

Nichiren Daishonin writes:

What could any of you have to lament? Even if you are not the Venerable Mahakashyapa, you should all perform a dance. Even if you are not Shariputra, you should leap up and dance. When Bodhisattva Superior Practices emerged from the earth, did he not emerge dancing? (“Great Evil and Great Good,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 1119)

In our Soka Gakkai discussion meetings, which embody the same spirit as Nichiren, we find an irrepressible optimism that cannot fail to dispel even grief and sorrow caused by great disasters or tragedies. Discussion meetings provide a venue where everyone can come together to return to their original vow from time without beginning and set off joyfully once again to fulfill their mission. This is proof that the Soka Gakkai is actually carrying on the essence of Nichiren Buddhism.

Mr. Toda encouraged us, saying: “Bodhisattvas suffering from poverty and illness are all still Bodhisattvas of the Earth. When you strive together with your fellow members, all problems will turn into benefit. You’ll attain a state of life that allows you to declare: I have won!”

In today’s world, where developing real human relationships seems to be growing more difficult, our discussion meetings are beautiful, almost miraculous, gatherings of joy and harmony. Each meeting is a truly precious part of our Buddhist practice.

Let us chant and bring forth the “wisdom of the truth that functions in accordance with changing circumstances” (The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, p. 189) to make our local discussion meetings the most enjoyable in all the world. Confidently calling on new Bodhisattvas of the Earth to emerge and join us, let us continue to send the light of human revolution to those around us!

Soka discussion meetings are the path to peace, opening the way to unite even the entire world in solidarity.

SGI President Ikeda’s monthly message from the October 2018 Living Buddhism, pp. 4–5.