THE TEACHINGS FOR VICTORY

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The following are excerpts from SGI President Ikeda’s lecture titled “The Buddhist Study of the Soka Gakkai: Elevating People’s Life State.”

When

Josei Toda was rebuilding the Soka Gakkai after World War II, he often said the reason that the other top Soka Gakkai leaders quit the organization when they were arrested by the wartime militarist authorities was that they lacked a foundation in Buddhist study.

After the war, Mr. Toda devoted himself wholeheartedly to promoting the study of Nichiren Buddhism in order to foster disciples who would remain undaunted in the face of any persecution or opposition.

Addressing members who didn’t feel the need for Buddhist study, he said:

I hear that some of you say, “As long as I can receive benefit, I’m happy; I don’t care about studying Buddhism.” That’s absurd. Buddhist study strengthens and increases your faith, which produces benefit.

Nichiren Buddhism teaches the four powers [the power of the Buddha, the power of the Law, the power of faith and the power of practice]. The power of the Buddha and the power of the Law increase in proportion to the strength of the power of faith and the power of practice. Therefore, bringing forth the powers of the Buddha and the Law in your life depends on the powers of your own faith and practice. The latter merge to become the powers of the Buddha and the Law, resulting in benefits that seem miraculous, defying comprehension.

It is the power of faith that enables us to freely tap the great and inexhaustible benefit of the Gohonzon. And Buddhist study is the means by which we strengthen our power of faith.

Through deepening our understanding of Nichiren Buddhism, we can transform questions and doubts into clarity, which in turn intensifies our prayers. When we truly come to appreciate how wonderful this Buddhism is, our prayers will be filled with gratitude. When we have unshakable conviction that our desires will be fulfilled, our prayers will overflow with joy.

In other words, by strengthening our faith through Buddhist study, our prayers will be filled with gratitude and joy, enabling us to tap, freely and powerfully, the benefit of the Gohonzon. (August 2017 Living Buddhism p. 47)

More On Buddhist Study

Nichiren

Daishonin writes: “Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 386). Faith is expressed as concrete efforts in practice and study.

“To the best of your ability” means exerting yourself to the fullest. There is no need to feel hesitant about talking to others about Buddhism because you’re not good at Buddhist study. For instance, you could just share some words from Nichiren that you find moving or something you learned through your Buddhist practice. Or you can tell someone, even with just a few words, that practicing Nichiren Buddhism is enjoyable, and that it will enable them to make their wishes come true. Mr. Toda said:

Buddhist study in the Soka Gakkai entails reading the The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin with our deeds, words and thoughts. As the Daishonin quotes, “The voice carries out the work of the Buddha” (The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, p. 4). Please talk with others freely and unhesitatingly about what you’ve learned about Nichiren Buddhism. By doing so, it will eventually become part of your life.

He also said: “Simply attending study lectures or reading the writings and saying that one understands the teachings is still the realm of theory; the important thing is to exert oneself in faith and practice in accord with those teachings.”

He further stressed to us that actually transforming our lives is more important than mere understanding.

Study based on the mentor-disciple spirit is the Soka Gakkai tradition. It is study for winning, providing us with the foundation to overcome obstacles by learning from the conduct of Nichiren Daishonin and summoning forth the spirit of a lion king. It is study for deepening our faith.

It is study for sharing the Mystic Law and realizing kosen-rufu, which spurs us to talk to others about the inspiration and joy we gain from studying Nichiren’s teachings.

It is study for inner transformation and human revolution, providing us with an opportunity to come into contact with the Daishonin’s spirit and confirm that we ourselves embody the Mystic Law.

Practice and study arise from faith, and faith is deepened by pursuing “the two ways of practice and study.” This is the rhythm of human revolution and kosen-rufu. (August 2017 Living Buddhism, pp. 49–50)
SGI-USA Essentials Exam, Part 3

January 2018
Study Guide and Workbook

Buddhist Terms:
Human Revolution • Many in Body, One in Mind
Changing Poison Into Medicine • The Eternity of Life
The Nine Levels of Consciousness • Buddhist Compassion

Excerpts From SGI President Ikeda's Lecture Series:
“Learning From Nichiren’s Writings: The Teachings for Victory”

History:
The Lineage and Tradition of Buddhist Humanism

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Buddhist study is a vital element for maintaining throughout our lives a consistent Buddhist practice and an ever-deepening faith. The SGI-USA study program aims to encourage members to strengthen their understanding of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings through the study of his writings, various Buddhist concepts, the history of Nichiren Buddhism and the SGI, and SGI President Ikeda’s commentaries.

President Ikeda says:

What does it mean to be a human being? What is life? What is the self? What is the purpose of life? What is true happiness? Why are we born? Why do we die? Buddhism is a philosophy of life that provides the fundamental answers to all these questions. Therefore, studying Buddhism and mastering its teachings is exploring the meaning of our own lives, and opening the door to a storeroom of the richest spiritual treasures.

Nichiren writes: “Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 386). Unless we also study while developing our faith, we can’t gain a profound understanding of the fundamental principles of Buddhism and genuinely deepen our faith. (The New Human Revolution, vol. 24, pp. 139–40)

The first level of the SGI-USA study program is the Introductory Exam. Those who have passed the Introductory Exam are eligible to take any of the three Essentials exams—Part 1, Part 2 or Part 3.

This three-part Essentials Exam series can be taken in any order. Once members pass all three exams, they will receive a completion certificate.

This study guide includes all the study material for Essentials Exam, Part 3, to be given in January 2018. Audio files for this material are available for free download at: sgi-usa.org/essentialstudy

For further information regarding the exam, please contact your local organization.
Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda used the term human revolution to describe the process of individual inner transformation that results from Buddhist practice. It addresses the real possibility for human beings to change, and in particular the development of the inner potential for enlightenment, or Buddhahood, the core purpose of Nichiren Buddhism. In that sense, human revolution can be seen as a modern expression of the principle of “attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.”

SGI President Ikeda explains:

There are all sorts of revolutions—political, economic, industrial, scientific, artistic and those in distribution and communications. And there are many others. Each has its significance and, often, necessity.

But no matter what one changes, the world will never get any better as long as the people—the guiding force and impetus behind all endeavors—remain selfish and lack compassion. In that respect, human revolution is the most fundamental of all revolutions and, at the same time, the most necessary. (Discussions on Youth, second edition, p. 256)

There are many ways to describe human revolution: A person preoccupied with the egoistic concerns of the “lesser self” transforms into one who lives according to his or her “greater self,” acting out of genuine concern for others’ well-being. Or someone who has caused nothing but trouble for others improves his or her behavior, begins helping others and becomes an asset to the community. There are endless ways in which we each can improve.

From the perspective of the Ten Worlds (see 2012 Introductory Exam Study Guide, pp. 16–22), we could say that human revolution means a change in our fundamental life state, from one characterized by the “four evil paths”—the worlds of hell, hunger, animality and anger—to one that exhibits the higher states, in particular, the worlds of bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

Human revolution is a never-ending process of continual self-improvement. It describes a Buddhist way of life that eternally seeks growth and personal development. It is about how much we are growing and improving right now rather than what we have achieved in the past.
The Mentor-Disciple Relationship: The Great Path of Human Revolution

The desire to become strong and unshaken by any difficulty propels our human revolution.

In “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” Nichiren Daishonin states, “Even though you chant and believe in Myoho-renge-kyo, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but an inferior teaching” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 3). Nichiren Buddhism emphasizes seeking both the causes and solutions to our problems within our own lives. It stresses that by tapping the power of the Law innate within us we can change any situation for the better.

When we seek influences that help us stimulate and bring forth the natural strength and wisdom we possess, and that inspire us on the path of Buddhist practice, we carry out human revolution. To this end, we need to learn from the teachings and example of an excellent teacher or mentor who is thoroughly dedicated to correct Buddhist practice. President Ikeda writes, “The path of mentor and disciple is strict and demanding; it is itself the great path of human revolution and attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 17, p. 16).

What qualifies a mentor in Nichiren Buddhism is lifelong commitment to the happiness of all people through the spread of the Mystic Law, and dauntless action to fulfill that commitment in the face of all obstacles and opposition. To simply mimic the mentor or seek the mentor’s approval is not the way of mentor and disciple. Rather, this relationship is based on sharing the same vow as the mentor to relieve the suffering of all people and continuously taking action toward that end. In striving to develop and act upon that vow, we break through the constraints of our weaker “lesser selves” and develop our “greater selves”—our true selves that regard the happiness of others as our own.

One Person Can Change the World

Though self-discipline may take us a long way, fundamental change comes only from transforming our innermost weaknesses into deeply rooted strengths. Human revolution requires identifying and challenging that which keeps us from expressing our full potential and deepest humanity, and replacing these things with causes that bring forth our true potential and genuine humanism. Through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and earnestly striving in our Buddhist practice, we tap inexhaustible courage, wisdom and compassion, and learn to create value in any situation.

President Ikeda states, “A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind” (The Human Revolution, p. viii). The transformation of all humanity—that is a grand objective indeed. When we can demonstrate through our behavior and attitude how we have changed, this becomes an example of the power of Buddhism. Simply speaking of enlightenment or Buddhahood in the abstract is useless. We must clearly show that we are progressing in life and that we are never defeated.

“I want you to be assured that the challenge to which we set ourselves day after day—that of our human revolution—is the royal road to bringing about a reformation in our families, local regions and societies,” President Ikeda says. “An inner revolution is the most fundamental and, at the same time, the ultimate revolution for engendering change in all things” (My Dear Friends in America, third edition, pp. 252–53).

Our practice as SGI members and the resulting inner transformation we achieve become the momentum for changing the destiny of all humanity.

(Published in the August 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 14–15)
Unity has long been recognized as a vital human value, necessary to any successful endeavor involving more than one person.

The philosopher and mathematician Gottfried Leibniz observed: “Reality cannot be found except in one single source, because of the interconnection of all things with one another . . . I do not conceive of any reality at all as without genuine unity.”

Buddhism sees the “single source” Leibniz alludes to as the Law, or Dharma, the principle that serves as the thread that connects all things. Nichiren Daishonin identified it as the Mystic Law, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Buddhism exists to awaken people to the vast power of this Law in each person’s life. And Nichiren Buddhism teaches that only in recognizing and striving to bring forth this power in both ourselves and others can we enjoy real happiness and move toward a peaceful world.

Nichiren emphasizes the importance of genuine unity among his followers who work together for this ideal, citing from Chinese literature the principle “many in body, one in mind” (Jpn itai doshin). He writes, “If the spirit of many in body but one in mind prevails among the people, they will achieve all their goals, whereas if one in body but different in mind, they can achieve nothing remarkable” (“Many in Body, One in Mind,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 618).

“Many in body,” also translated as “different in body,” refers to the diversity among individuals—their unique personalities, qualities, abilities and roles.

Some associate the word unity with conformity, and hence view it as a negative. Unity that is forced and seeks to control people, however, is the complete opposite of the unity of many in body, one in mind. It might best be described as “one in body, different in mind.” The more people are coerced to conform, the less able they will be to genuinely unite in spirit. Under such circumstances, people may put on a show of unity but are in reality more concerned with protecting themselves.

SGI President Ikeda comments: “I find it profoundly significant that Nichiren doesn’t use the term one in body, one in mind—which is commonly used in Japanese to signify unity in conformity—rather, he uses many in body, one in mind, signaling unity in diversity. In other words, though we may share the same purpose or aspiration, we do not suppress or deny our own individuality. When we each fully express our unique potential through the power of the Mystic Law, we can manifest the invincible strength of the unity of many in body, one in mind” (The Hope-filled Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, pp. 205–06).

The unity of many in body, one in mind can be formed only among those who respect one another and cherish one another’s unique attributes and abilities, while working in harmony to compensate for one another’s weaknesses. To create this kind of unity, each person must set aside attachment to self and accomplish a profound inner transformation, what we call human revolution.
“One in mind”—also “same mind” or “same heart”—means sharing a noble purpose, a common wish to realize a lofty goal. In the realm of Nichiren Buddhism, this means the wish to accomplish kosen-rufu, the wide dissemination of the Law for the happiness of all people. Nichiren refers to this same mind or heart when he says: “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” WND-1, 385); and “It is the heart that is important” (“The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” WND-1, 1000). Ultimately, it is a spirit deeply rooted in the Mystic Law itself.

When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon with the “same mind as Nichiren”—based on the spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple—we make this possible. The mentor stakes his or her life on the vow to accomplish kosen-rufu and constantly endeavors to awaken that spirit in others. As this vow awakens in our own lives, we begin to pray and work earnestly for not only our own happiness, but for that of our friends, family and fellow members, and more broadly, for all humanity. As a result, the Buddha nature inherent within us emerges.

Nichiren teaches that if we persevere in faith with the same spirit as his and work together in mutual harmony and respect, the goal of kosen-rufu will definitely be realized. Thus, both the spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple and the unity of many in body, one in mind are necessary if we wish to realize world peace.

President Ikeda writes: “The oneness of mentor and disciple and the spirit of many in body, one in mind are essentially inseparable principles; they are like the two wheels of a cart. If we do not share our mentor’s heart or spirit to realize kosen-rufu, there will be no genuine unity of purpose among our diverse membership. Nor can we be called disciples who truly embody our mentor’s spirit if we fail to cherish our harmonious community of practitioners and to make continuous efforts to forge and maintain unity” (The Hope-filled Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 203).

These are not mere static principles or points of doctrine. They describe relationships based on the Mystic Law that can be endlessly deepened, as can the power and wisdom they enable us to bring forth.

(Published in the June 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 14–15)

Changin Poison Into Medicine

Nichiren Buddhism stands apart from other Buddhist traditions in many ways. These differences, more than similarities, shed light on the power that Nichiren Buddhism has to enable all people to transform suffering into wisdom and happiness. They also make possible a positive change in the destiny of humanity. We often refer to this as the power to “change poison into medicine.”

While Buddhism is viewed as an egalitarian religion, Buddhist teachings that predate the Lotus Sutra do not make clear that all people equally possess the potential for enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin, however, clarified that the potential for Buddhahood exists within every person at every moment and taught how to bring forth that potential. To illustrate this, he employed philosophical principles from the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai, which were based on the Lotus Sutra. Important among these are the “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds” and “three thousand realms in a single moment of life.” From these concepts come a number of ideas that, when considered from the standpoint of traditional Buddhist doctrines and the common understanding of people in 13th-century Japan, must have seemed revolutionary. To offer some examples, here are four principles that underscore the idea of changing poison into medicine.

1. “The attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles”: Sutras that predate the Lotus Sutra held that persons of the two vehicles, due to complacency or arrogance, had “scorched the seeds” of Buddhahood and were incapable of attaining enlightenment. But the Lotus Sutra reveals that they and all people will attain Buddhahood if they practice the sutra’s teachings.

2. “The attainment of Buddhahood in one’s present form”: Pre-Lotus Sutra teachings regard a Buddha as a being far superior to ordinary people. Moreover, women were seen as inherently incapable of attaining Buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra reveals that all ordinary people, men and women alike, can manifest Buddhahood just as they are.

3. “Earthly desires are enlightenment”: Early Buddhist teachings regard earthly desires, or deluded impulses, as sources of suffering and impediments to enlightenment. In contrast, the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life reveals that the potential for Buddhahood exists even within states of delusion and desire. Nichiren writes that when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo we are “burning the firewood of earthly desires, summoning up the wisdom fire of bodhi or enlightenment” (The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, p. 11). Desires and suffering fuel our Buddhist practice and enable us to bring forth enlightened wisdom.

4. “The sufferings of birth and death are nirvana”: Early Buddhist schools taught that only by extinguishing the cycle of death and rebirth could one be free of suffering. Nirvana literally
means to “blow out” one’s very existence as one would a candle flame. Based on the Lotus Sutra, however, Nichiren taught that the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth is natural to all life, and can never be extinguished. At the core of this cycle is an enduring life essence in which Buddhahood is an eternal potential. Buddhahood, or nirvana, is a natural and ideal condition we develop through our Buddhist practice, in which we can joyfully undergo the cycle of birth and death.

Transforming Suffering Into Fortune and Happiness

Nagarjuna, the great Indian philosopher of Buddhism, referred to the Lotus Sutra, or specifically the Sanskrit word samyak, translated as myo in the sutra’s title, as being “like a great physician who can change poison into medicine” (“The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 146). He said this in reference to the sutra’s pronouncement that persons of the two vehicles can in fact attain Buddhahood. The Mystic Law, represented by the character myo, makes this possible.

Regarding Nagarjuna’s statement, Nichiren writes: “What is the poison? It is the three paths of earthly desires, karma, and suffering that are our lot. What is the medicine? It is the Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation. And what does it mean to change poison into medicine? It means to transform the three paths into the three virtues: the Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation” (“What It Means to Hear the Buddha Vehicle,” WND-2, 743).

When earthly desires, or deluded impulses, motivate our actions, those actions become negative karma that brings about suffering. Suffering leads to further deluded impulses, which give rise to actions that create negative karma and lead to further suffering. This is the cycle known as the three paths.

But our practice of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo enables us to bring forth the condition of Buddhahood even in the midst of delusion. Our actions become those of a Buddha (represented by the virtue known as the Dharma body), are infused with the Buddha wisdom (the virtue of wisdom) and give rise to good karma that brings about happiness and fulfillment (the virtue of emancipation).

Applied to our daily lives, this means that even the worst circumstances or suffering, through faith in and practice of the Mystic Law, can be transformed into happiness and fortune.

SGI President Ikeda states:

Buddhism teaches the principle of changing poison into medicine. Therefore, no matter what difficulties we may encounter, we can take them on with a positive attitude. All we have to do is keep pressing forward with deep confidence in the Daishonin’s words, “When great evil occurs, great good follows” (“Great Evil and Great Good,” WND-1, 1119). (March 18, 2011, World Tribune, p. 5)

Changing poison into medicine means that, however deep or serious a problem we may face, or how intense our present suffering, as we persevere in chanting and engaging in activities for kosen-rufu, we will not only overcome our problem or suffering, but as a result of overcoming it, we will enjoy benefit and happiness far surpassing the degree of that suffering.

(Published in the September 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 14–15)

3. Persons of the two vehicles: Voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones. In light of the Ten Worlds, they are practitioners in the worlds of voice-hearers (learning) and cause-awakened ones (realization).
The Eternity of Life

A clear awareness and correct understanding of the nature of death can enable us to live fully and without fear, with clarity of purpose and joy. Nichiren Daishonin viewed death and dying as a paramount issue we all must face and seek to understand.

He writes: “The life of a human being is fleeting. The exhaled breath never waits for the inhaled one. Even dew before the wind is hardly a sufficient metaphor. It is the way of the world that whether one is wise or foolish, old or young, one never knows what will happen to one from one moment to the next. Therefore I should first of all learn about death, and then about other things” (“The Importance of the Moment of Death,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 2, p. 759).

The Buddhist view of life is that it is eternal—that our lives have continued and will continue to exist eternally.

SGI President Ikeda explains:

The difficulty is that even if one consciously makes an effort to become aware of the eternity of life, ultimately it is life that supports the self that is trying to achieve this awareness. One cannot comprehend what is large with what is small; by analogy, a wave cannot comprehend the ocean over whose surface it passes. What, then, are we to do?

The only way to awaken to life’s eternity is to cause the greater, eternal self to “emerge” in the small self. And to do this, we need to undertake the task of self-purification wholeheartedly, with our entire being. This is the purpose of Buddhist practice. (The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra, vol. 3, p. 258)

Rather than trying to ignore or avoid the subject of death, as people these days seem inclined to do, Nichiren Buddhists strive to grasp the true, eternal nature of life through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and diligently carrying out our Buddhist practice.

Death and Dying

A lifetime of one’s actions—remembered and forgotten—will be expressed in how we face death. Those who have lived sincerely and contributed to others’ well-being are likely to die with a deep sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. On the other hand, those who have lived in idleness, self-indulgence or without respect or concern for others, may face death with regret.

Dying and death are processes of transition from this existence to the next. While it is possible to improve our state of being when we are alive, in the afterlife—the period of transition from this life to the next—life is no longer in its active state; one’s life condition at the moment of death will continue beyond death and influence the circumstances of one’s rebirth. Death, then, is an important link between this existence and the next.
Life and Death in Buddhahood

Those who face death while in the state of Buddhahood will pass into death in that same state, which will also influence the circumstances of their next life. Nichiren Daishonin writes about one of his disciples: “When he was alive, he was a Buddha in life, and now he is a Buddha in death. He is a Buddha in both life and death. This is what is meant by that most important doctrine called attaining Buddhahood in one’s present form” ("Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light," WND-1, 456).

No matter the circumstances by which those of strong faith may encounter the end of their lives, at the moment of death they can experience the state of Buddhahood because of the power of the Mystic Law. Nichiren, writing about the time of death, states:

For one who summons up one’s faith and chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the profound insight that now is the last moment of one’s life, the sutra proclaims: “When the lives of these persons come to an end, they will be received into the hands of a thousand Buddhas, who will free them from all fear and keep them from falling into the evil paths of existence.” How can we possibly hold back our tears at the inexpressible joy of knowing that . . . as many as a thousand Buddhas will come to greet us with open arms! (“The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” WND-1, 216–17)

When we fully practice Buddhism and live each minute, each day as though it is our last, making every moment count, we can welcome the end of this life, no matter when that may be, without having any regrets.

President Ikeda proclaims: “Death will come to each of us some day. We can die having failed to do so. Since the reality of death is the same in either case, isn’t it far better that we set out on our journey toward the next existence in high spirits with a bright smile on our faces—knowing that in everything we did, we did the very best we could, thrilling with the thought ‘That was truly an interesting life?’” (October 24, 1997, World Tribune, p. 11).

Practicing Nichiren Buddhism lets us enjoy and appreciate this life to the fullest, as we build a state of eternal happiness that transcends the boundaries of life and death.

(Published in the October 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 12–13)
The Nine Levels of Consciousness

Shakyamuni Buddha taught that suffering arises from impurities of perception and consciousness. For this reason, purifying the consciousness became a goal of Buddhist practice. “The nine levels of consciousness,” or “nine consciousnesses,” is a Buddhist system describing the makeup of the conscious and subconscious realms of life. In addition to shedding light on life’s inner workings, Buddhism provides the means for replacing delusion with wisdom to perceive things as they truly are.

“Consciousness,” in the Buddhist context, is a translation of vijñana, a Sanskrit word meaning “the faculty of discernment,” or “perception.” It refers not only to waking awareness but also to internal capacities and energies that direct our lives.

The first six levels of consciousness correspond to our five sensory organs—eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. They are: 1) sight-consciousness, 2) hearing-consciousness, 3) smell-consciousness, 4) taste-consciousness and 5) touch-consciousness.

These gather and perceive information about the world and pass it to the sixth consciousness, the mind-consciousness, which integrates the information into coherent images, assesses it and forms responses. Suppose someone is yelling at you. You perceive this information through your five senses, and your sixth consciousness interprets it, concludes the person is angry and considers and initiates a response.

The sixth consciousness is always at work in support of our day-to-day activities. Memory, imagination and dreams also take place on this level, so the mind-consciousness can be at work even without immediate input from the five senses.

These first six levels are strongly influenced by deeper levels of consciousness. Impulses arising from the seventh and eighth levels of consciousness affect the way the five senses perceive information and how the mind interprets it. Emotions, deep-seated attitudes and self-attachment can change or skew our perception. By purifying the first six levels of consciousness, we are able to perceive all things in their true light. This is why Nichiren describes “purification of the six sense organs” as an important benefit of Buddhist practice.

Unlike the first six levels, the seventh, manas-consciousness, does not depend directly on the external world. It is the internal, spiritual, intuitive realm of life where self-attachment and the ability to distinguish oneself from others, capacities necessary for survival, reside. This subconscious drive to differentiate self from others, however, if too strong, gives rise to arrogance, insecurity, conflict and misery. So while the sixth consciousness enables you to decide that your friend is angry, the seventh determines how that makes you feel and how it affects your sense of identity. If that sense is unbalanced, this might lead you to act in a way that compounds the problem. The seventh level also includes one’s sense of right and wrong, which if healthy can overpower the impulse to act selfishly or rashly.

The eighth level is the alaya-consciousness—the Sanskrit word alaya meaning “storehouse.”
It is the “karmic storehouse” where latent causes and effects resulting from all one’s thoughts, words and deeds throughout time reside. Your reaction to your friend’s anger will be influenced by all your past causes and effects. The first seven levels of consciousness cease upon death, but the eighth persists eternally, carrying with it the distinct nature of one’s being throughout the cycle of birth and death.

SGI President Ikeda states: “The term storehouse conjures the image of an actual structure into which things of substance can be placed. But in fact it may be more accurate to say that the life current of karmic energy itself constitutes the eighth consciousness . . . Moreover, the eighth consciousness transcends the boundaries of the individual and interacts with the karmic energy of others. On the inner dimension of life, this latent karmic energy merges with the latent energy of one’s family, one’s ethnic group and humankind, and also with that of animals and plants” (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 4, pp. 262–63).

This is why one person’s inner transformation, or “human revolution,” can change the destiny of a family, society and even of all humankind.

The traditional Buddhist view holds that changing negative karma for the better involves countering every past bad cause with a good cause. This process was thought to take countless lifetimes and require that no new bad causes be made—unlikely in a world filled with impure and negative influences.

In contrast, Nichiren taught that we can fundamentally transform our karma and create supreme value and happiness in this life by tapping into an even deeper, more powerful level of consciousness. This is the ninth consciousness, also called the amala-consciousness—the Sanskrit word *amala* meaning “pure” or “stainless.” It is the “fundamental pure consciousness” existing at a depth of life free from all karmic impurity and is synonymous with the world of Buddhahood.

President Ikeda explains, “Just as the light of the stars and the moon seems to vanish when the sun rises, when we bring forth the state of Buddhahood in our lives we cease to suffer negative effects for each individual past offense committed” (*August 2003 Living Buddhism*, p. 47).

When we tap into our amala-consciousness by chanting Nam-myoho-RENge-kyo, we can positively transform our karmic tendencies and reactions, and create value from every situation—even being yelled at by a friend. For instance, instead of taking offense, we can see the situation more clearly, perhaps even appreciating that person’s anger as a sign of concern.

Nichiren identifies the ninth consciousness as Nam-myoho-RENge-kyo, which he embodied in the form of the Gohonzon. He teaches, “You should base your mind on the ninth consciousness, and carry out your practice in the six consciousnesses” (“Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light,” *The Writing of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 458). This means that those who practice Nichiren Buddhism reveal the qualities of a Buddha (the ninth consciousness) in their everyday behavior (the first six levels of consciousness).

Nichiren also states: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The body is the palace of the ninth consciousness, the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life’s functions” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832). Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon with faith in our innate Buddha nature enables us to access this “palace of the ninth consciousness,” causing all other levels of consciousness to glow with the compassion, wisdom and courage of Buddhahood.

(*Published in the November 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 10–11*)
Most of us can admit to being self-centered at times—thinking first of ourselves and only then of others. Self-concern, of course, is an important part of living—we need to feed, clothe and obtain shelter for ourselves, and be attentive to our long-term welfare. But when self-interest becomes the dominant force in our lives, it can cause us to act insensitively and even harmfully toward others. Buddhism in particular highlights the intrinsic connection between our personal well-being and that of others.

Many of us have experienced a sense of fulfillment from going out of our way to help another person. Doing so lets us step beyond what may be our usual self-centeredness, and this, it turns out, allows positive feelings and qualities to arise within us. This is why compassionate acts form an essential part of Buddhist practice.

In Chinese and Japanese Buddhist texts, including Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, the word for compassion comprises two Chinese characters, pronounced jihi in Japanese. The first character, ji, corresponds to the Sanskrit word maitri, meaning “to give happiness.” The second, hi, corresponds to the Sanskrit karuna, meaning “to remove suffering.” Taken together they describe the function of relieving living beings of suffering and giving them happiness.

In Nichiren Buddhism, we practice for our own happiness and for the happiness of others, and in the process develop faith in our own and all people’s potential to attain enlightenment. Our actions to help others realize this potential constitute true Buddhist compassion.

Buddhist practice allows us to go beyond simply observing others’ suffering and feeling sorry for them. Compassion is not merely offering sympathy and a helping hand. From the perspective of Nichiren Buddhism, true compassion has the power to root out the cause of misery in people’s lives and direct them to the cause for happiness. Such compassion by its very nature requires courage and strength.

Almost anyone can feel kindness toward a person who has shown them kindness. However, in letters he wrote, Nichiren urges his disciples to compassionately embrace all people as their own children and to cultivate a state of life that enables them to do so.

But how can we muster compassion, especially when we just aren’t feeling it? The prayers and actions we take in the course of our Buddhist practice, in our activities as SGI members, cause genuine compassion to awaken within us. Often, taking such action requires courage.

Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda once said: “The essence of Buddhism is compassion. We, too, need to have compassion but, being ordinary mortals, the reality is that it is quite difficult for us. Courage substitutes for compassion. I am speaking of the courage to save others from suffering. To practice Buddhism with courage translates into compassion” (Buddhism Day by Day, p. 57).

This is why introducing others to Buddhism can be seen as the primary practical means for awakening and giving expression to true compassion. Because it enables people to attain a state of indestructible happiness,
it is an act that in itself embodies great compassion.

When we actively take part in SGI activities—encouraging others through sharing our own experiences of breaking through our problems, visiting fellow members to chant and study together, and offering heartfelt support—we are expressing Buddhist compassion through courageous action. We find ourselves breaking through our lesser, self-centered selves and developing a vast life state and a generous heart. We naturally find ourselves working for the happiness of others, to better society, and to protect and propagate the Mystic Law.

To favor certain people over others is a natural human tendency, and having compassion does not require that we like everyone equally. A Buddha, however, holds no preferences when it comes to relieving people’s suffering. Because compassion arises from our innate Buddha nature, it is impartial. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, we can find the wisdom to recognize the positive qualities in others—even those we may dislike.

While it is easy to identify others’ weak points, it is harder to see and appreciate their strong points. But if we focus on the strong points, we will naturally come to appreciate, feel closer to and respect others. Compassion includes the ability to recognize in others strengths and capacities that we ourselves may be lacking, as well as our wish to learn from those qualities. As a result, we may find ourselves thinking of others more often and feeling concerned about their well-being.

SGI President Ikeda states: “Compassion is the very soul of Buddhism. To pray for others, making their problems and anguish our own; to embrace those who are suffering, becoming their greatest ally; to continue giving them our support and encouragement until they become truly happy—the Daishonin’s Buddhism lives and breathes in such humanistic actions” (My Dear Friends in America, third edition, pp. 198–99).

We practice Buddhism for our own happiness and that of others. These two aims of faith cannot be separated. When our thoughts for others’ well-being become part of our daily prayers, we transcend the innate impulse to be self-centered and thereby illuminate our innate Buddhahood.

(Published in the July 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 14–15)
How wondrous it is that, around two hundred years and more into the Latter Day of the Law, I was the first to reveal as the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra this great mandala that even those such as [the learned Indian Buddhist monks] Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu [and the Great Teachers of China] T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo were unable to express. This mandala is in no way my invention. It is the object of devotion that depicts Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honored One, seated in the treasure tower of Many Treasures Buddha, and the Buddhas who were Shakyamuni’s emanations as perfectly as a print matches its woodblock. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 831)

Nichiren Daishonin [states]: “This mandala is in no way my invention” (WND-1, 831). The Gohonzon, he assures us, is not his arbitrary creation. It is the object of devotion depicting the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo—the Law for manifesting Buddhahood, which is inherent within our own life—embodied by Shakyamuni Buddha, seated in the treasure tower of Many Treasures Buddha, and all the Buddhas who were his emanations. In other words, the Gohonzon is a perfect representation of the “true aspect of all phenomena,” and the foundational principles of the “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds” and “three thousand realms in a single moment of life,” all of which were elucidated during the Ceremony in the Air of the Lotus Sutra.

Illuminating All Living Beings of the Ten Worlds

Selected Sections From SGI President Ikeda’s Study Lecture Series

[35]

“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon” Tapping the Infinite Benefit of the Gohonzon Through Faith
When we look at the layout of the Gohonzon, we see that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—referred to in this letter as “the five characters of the Lotus Sutra’s title” (WND-1, 831)—is written down the center, flanked by representatives of each of the Ten Worlds. This indicates that all living beings of the Ten Worlds, from the Buddhas and bodhisattvas on down, are without exception embodied in the Gohonzon. This accords with the passage from “Treasure Tower,” the 11th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, cited by Nichiren in this letter: “[Shakya-muni Buddha used his transcendental powers to] lift all the members of the great assembly up into the air” (WND-1, 832). The Gohonzon, therefore, includes without exception “all the various beings” of the Ten Worlds. It is a representation of the “mutual possession of the Ten Worlds,” the principle that all living beings, when illuminated by the light of the Mystic Law, can display the “dignified attributes that they inherently possess” (WND-1, 832).

In short, when all of the functions of the Ten Worlds within our lives are enveloped in the light of the wisdom and compassion of the world of Buddhahood, we can give expression to the power of supreme goodness and create enduring value. It also means that each unique individual comes to shine as an entity of the Mystic Law and to manifest their inherently dignified nature. The Gohonzon enables us to build what Mr. Toda described as “a joyful, pure and sunny realm of friends living together in harmony and peace.”

In such a realm, everyone—irrespective of their circumstances or whether they are still in the process of transforming their karma—shines with the “dignified attributes that they inherently possess.” Those in the world of hell, for instance, manifest the world of hell contained within the world of Buddhahood, and though there may still be suffering, it is not the hopeless suffering of wandering lost in eternal darkness. They can bring forth the courage to face difficult realities head-on, the wisdom to surmount the obstacles and barriers arising from within and from without, and the powerful life force to make new strides forward. Sufferings become challenges that aid one’s personal transformation and growth, becoming springboards to great development.

Illuminated by the light of the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo, the noble state of life that is one with the Mystic Law functions vibrantly even in the world of hell. The meaning of the sufferings of hell is thereby turned around completely.

While in prison, founding Soka Gakkai President Tsunesaburo Makiguchi serenely wrote: “Concentrating intently on my faith is my work right now. If I can do that, I am not the least bit anxious . . . Depending on one’s frame of mind, even hell can be enjoyable.” Mr. Toda also said that if we base ourselves on the Gohonzon, we can gain a state of being in which we are filled with boundless joy wherever we go.

Every person’s life is an entity that inherently embodies the principles of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and the three thousand realms in a single moment of life. In essence, it is perfect and complete—there is nothing extraneous to be subtracted and nothing lacking that needs to be added. No existence is without its joys and sorrows, its ups and downs. And no matter how we might try, we cannot avoid the universal sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death.

The mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is the true aspect of life, and each of the mutually inclusive Ten Worlds is a manifestation of the Mystic Law. The Gohonzon and faith in the Mystic Law enable us to draw out the supreme life state of Buddhahood and firmly establish it in our being.

The layout of the Gohonzon is based on the true aspect of all phenomena elucidated in the Lotus Sutra, clarifying that we as ordinary people can manifest the boundless life state of Buddhahood in our present form. No such object of devotion ever existed in Buddhism prior to this. Though there were many
magnificent depictions of Buddhas and bodhisattvas in paintings and sculptures, there was no mandala embodying the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds that enabled ordinary people to attain enlightenment. Nichiren Daishonin was the first to reveal the Gohonzon that illuminates the dignified attributes that we inherently possess, in other words, an object of devotion for the enlightenment of all humanity. This Gohonzon was truly the “great mandala never before known” (WND-1, 832), depicting the realm of a truly humanistic Buddhism.

Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. 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.” This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith. This is what the sutra means when it states that one can “gain entrance through faith alone” [The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras, p. 110]. (WND-1, 832)

The Gohonzon Exists Within Us

Nichinyo must have been extremely moved to learn that the Gohonzon she received from Nichiren Daishonin is the Gohonzon that has been revealed for the first time in the Latter Day of the Law. But, then, he discloses an even more astonishing fact, writing: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (WND-1, 832). He is saying that the Gohonzon does not exist outside us, but within our own lives. Shifting the focus of faith and practice from the external to the internal was a dramatic change.

In Nichiren’s day—and, in many cases, even today—we find a deeply rooted view that we are but small, insignificant beings and the ultimate reality and eternal value lies somewhere outside of us, somewhere far away. Such a way of thinking is inextricably connected with belief in some otherworldly, supernatural power.

Nichiren Buddhism, however, rejects this idea completely. It teaches the true reality of life in which the eternal and ultimate Law is manifested in the physical beings of the ordinary people, living right here and now.

The term Buddha, after all, means “enlightened one.” To what did the Buddha become enlightened? To that which should form the true basis of our life—namely, the Law and the true essence of our being. He awoke to the universal Law permeating all phenomena, which had previously been obscured by fundamental darkness, and to the greatness of each individual’s life that is one and indivisible with that Law.

“The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people”—the real significance of this statement is that the Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren functions as the means by which we can awaken to and call forth the Gohonzon (the Buddhahood) within us. When we chant before the physical Gohonzon, the very same Gohonzon is in our heart; it clearly manifests itself there when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for the happiness of ourselves and others.

In another letter that the Daishonin sent to Nichinyo the following year (1278), titled “An Outline of the ‘Entrustment’ and Other
Chapters,” he writes in a similar vein, “When I ponder where this ‘Treasure Tower’ chapter is now, I see that it exists in the eight-petaled lotus flower of the heart\textsuperscript{10} within the breast of Nichinyo” (WND-1, 915). No doubt when she read the Daishonin’s words, Nichinyo was reminded of his earlier assertion that “the Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people.” Here, the terms “within the mortal flesh” and “in the eight-petaled lotus flower of the heart” have the same meaning of “within the depths of one’s own life.”

Still another way Nichiren describes our inner being is “the palace of the ninth consciousness, the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life’s functions” (WND-1, 832). The ninth consciousness—also the amala-consciousness, or pure consciousness—is often referred to in Buddhist texts as the “mind king”\textsuperscript{9} or “ruler of the mind,” indicating the fundamental entity of the mind itself. “The unchanging reality” means the ultimate truth, free from all delusion. Since the “mind king” dwells in this unchanging reality, our mortal bodies are called its “palace.”

In “Reply to Kyo’o,” he writes, “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart” (WND-1, 412). He is saying here that he has inscribed in the form of the Gohonzon the life state of Buddhahood that he has attained as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, a life state that is identical with the unchanging reality.

The Gohonzon is in the form of a mandala. The Sanskrit term mandala has also been translated into Chinese as “perfectly endowed” and “a cluster of blessings” (see WND-1, 832). It means a trove of infinite benefit that we can draw from and enjoy freely.

Mr. Toda said, “Nichiren Daishonin’s life is Nam-myoho-renga-kyo, so our lives, as his disciples, are also Nam-myoho-renga-kyo.”\textsuperscript{12}

On another occasion, he declared: “When we embrace faith in the Mystic Law, the fundamental power of Nichiren Daishonin wells up in response from within our beings, and we, too, reveal our true self—that is, our true enlightened nature that is one with the eternal, unchanging reality.”\textsuperscript{13}

(Excerpted from the September 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 24–31)

1. Myoho-renga-kyo is written with five Chinese characters, while Nam-myoho-renga-kyo is written with seven (nam or namu, being comprised of two characters). The Daishonin often uses Myoho-renga-kyo synonymously with Nam-myoho-renga-kyo in his writings.
2. True aspect of all phenomena: The ultimate truth or reality that permeates all phenomena and is in no way separate from them. Through the explanation of the ten factors, “Expedient Means,” the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, teaches that all people are inherently endowed with the potential to become Buddhas and clarifies the truth that they can tap and manifest this potential.
3. Mutual possession of the Ten Worlds: The principle that each of the Ten Worlds possesses the potential for all ten within itself. “Mutual possession” means that life is not fixed in one or another of the Ten Worlds, but can manifest any of the ten—from hell to the state of Buddhahood—at any given moment. The important point of this principle is that all beings in any of the nine worlds possess the Buddha nature. This means that every person has the potential to manifest Buddhahood, while a Buddha also possesses the nine worlds and in this sense is not separate or different from ordinary people.
4. Three thousand realms in a single moment of life: A doctrine developed by the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China based on the Lotus Sutra. The principle that all phenomena are contained within a single moment of life and that a single moment of life permeates the three thousand realms of existence, or the entire phenomenal world.
7. Ninth consciousness: Also, amala-consciousness. The Buddha nature, or the fundamental purifying force, that is free from all karmic impediments. Here, the Daishonin is associating it with Nam-myoho-renga-kyo.
8. The Japanese word for faith consists of two Chinese characters.
9. Fundamental darkness: The most deeply rooted illusion inherent in life, said to give rise to all other illusions. The inability to see or recognize the truth, particularly, the true nature of one’s life.
10. The “eight-petaled lotus flower of the heart” refers to the arrangement of the heart, lungs and other organs in the chest cavity, which was thought to resemble an eight-petaled lotus blossom.
11. The “mind king” refers to the core of the mind, which controls the various workings of the mind.
Next, the four debts of gratitude of Buddhism are (1) the debt of gratitude to be paid to one’s father and mother; (2) the debt of gratitude to be paid to the ruler of the nation; (3) the debt of gratitude to be paid to all living beings; and (4) the debt of gratitude to be paid to the three treasures [the Buddha, the Law, and the Order].

Third is the debt of gratitude to be paid to all living beings. If you stop to consider, you will realize that, at one time or another in the past, all men have been your father and all women, your mother. Thus, in the course of all the many lifetimes and existences you have lived through, you have come to owe a debt of gratitude to all living beings. And since this is so, you should help all of them to attain Buddhahood. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 2, pp. 636–37)

Challenging Our Human Revolution Is the Way To Repay Our Debts of Gratitude

Nichiren Daishonin discusses the four debts of gratitude as elucidated from the perspective of Buddhism.

Gratitude entails knowing to whom we are indebted for our present life and circumstances and, by dedicating ourselves to our Buddhist practice, repaying that debt of gratitude. In another sense, repaying our debts of gratitude means elevating our state of life from one of being supported by others to supporting others and drawing the power to do so from the innermost depths of our being.

In Sanskrit, there is the expression krita-jna, which literally means “acknowledging (jna) what has been done on one’s behalf (krita).” After one acknowledges and appreciates what has been done for one, the next step is to live a life dedicated to the welfare of others. This is the origin of the phrase repaying debts of gratitude that appears in the Chinese sutras.

Knowing and having appreciation for the fact that who we are now is the result of the actions and support of many others can powerfully affirm our sense of self and establish a solid foundation for our lives, which creates the basis for ongoing personal growth.
Repaying our debts of gratitude is the challenge of human revolution, the process by which we can develop our potential to the greatest possible extent.

In this letter, Nichiren discusses the four debts of gratitude owed by all.

The first is the debt of gratitude to one’s father and mother. How infinitely profound is the debt we owe to our parents who gave us life and nurtured us! The Daishonin says that our debt to our father is higher than Mount Sumeru, and our debt to our mother is deeper than the ocean (see WND-2, 637). We must find some way of repaying this enormous debt. The first thing we need to do, he tells us, is to take faith in Buddhism (see WND-2, 637). The greatest wish of parents is the growth and happiness of their children, so entering the path to happiness by having faith in and practicing Buddhism is the kindest thing we can do for our parents and the best way to repay our debt of gratitude to them.

Second is the debt of gratitude to the nation’s ruler. This is the gratitude owed to the sovereign for supporting one’s livelihood, thereby providing one with food, shelter and clothing (see WND-2, 637). In today’s democratic world, where sovereignty rests with the people, it is gratitude to society itself. Similarly, therefore, Nichiren’s remarks about praying for the ruler to “enjoy peace and security in the present existence and good circumstances in future existences” (see The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras, p. 136), could today be interpreted as praying for the happiness of every member of society.

The third is the debt of gratitude to all living beings. Life is eternal, extending through the three existences of past, present and
future; the sutras teach that we have been born in this world after having undergone the cycle of birth and death infinite times. From that point of view, at one time or another in the past, all men have been our father and all women have been our mother (see WND-2, 637). Buddhism sees us all as related and owing debts of gratitude to one another.

Nichiren indicates here that this is why we should wish for the happiness of all people. Since supreme happiness lies in attaining the life state of Buddhahood, the best way to repay our debt of gratitude to others is to teach them Buddhism, the ultimate means for gaining enlightenment.

[Second Soka Gakkai President Josei] Toda said: “True greatness means that, even if you forget what you’ve done for others, you never forget what others have done for you, and always do your utmost to repay your debts of gratitude. Therein shines the light of Buddhism. Such people radiate integrity, depth of character, generosity and charm.”

This, too, is the conclusion at which I have arrived after more than 60 years of Buddhist practice. I have seen many different people—people who have lived lives of gratitude, people who have been ingrates. Those who have a sense of appreciation and gratitude are loved and trusted by everyone, and lead lives of tremendous fulfillment and satisfaction. Based on the Daishonin’s teachings, it is clear that the inner radiance of those who embody true gratitude will imbue their lives with indestructible good fortune and benefit throughout the three existences.

If one asks, then, what sutra enables one to repay the four debts of gratitude, I would reply that it is none other than the Lotus Sutra, which reveals that women can attain Buddhahood . . .

[What] reason is there to believe that our mothers, through the power of this sutra, cannot become Buddhas? Therefore a person who upholds the Lotus Sutra is repaying the debt of gratitude owed to father and mother. Even if one does not feel in one’s own heart that one can do so, one can repay it through the power of this sutra.

(WND-2, 637–38)

The Lotus Sutra Is the Sole Buddhist Teaching That Enables One To Repay the Debt of Gratitude to One’s Mother

Fourth, Nichiren Daishonin teaches that repaying our debt of gratitude to the three treasures of Buddhism is most important in order to establish the best possible life as a human being. The three treasures are the three pillars of Buddhist faith and practice—namely, the treasure of the Buddha, the treasure of the Law (the Buddha’s teachings) and the treasure of the Buddhist Order (the community of believers). Nichiren’s discussion of the debt of gratitude we owe to the three treasures in this writing is predicated on the question of what is the sutra that truly benefits all people.

Referring to Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai’s classification of Shakyamuni’s lifetime teachings according to five periods, the Daishonin specifically investigates which sutras contain the teaching of the attainment of Buddhahood by women, which he identifies as the criterion for repaying one’s gratitude to one’s parents, and
especially to one’s mother. The classification of the five periods evaluates Shakayamuni’s teachings, not just in terms of chronological periods, but based on a thorough investigation of the Buddha’s true intent—that is, what his message was and how he was trying to convey it. We can assume that Nichiren is presenting the basics of this classification system to Tokimitsu here in an easily accessible fashion, as an aid to the young man’s further study of Buddhism.

He then poses the question of which sutra enables one to truly repay the four debts of gratitude. He indicates that when the Buddhist scriptures are measured by the benchmark teaching of the attainment of enlightenment by women, only the Lotus Sutra passes the test.

Tokimitsu’s father died when he was young, and it was his mother (the lay nun Ueno) who kept the family together. Having personally witnessed this, Tokimitsu must have earnestly wished to repay his debt of gratitude to his mother and assure her abiding happiness. At the same time, he must have also felt a desire to repay his debt of gratitude to his father, who had taught him about faith in the Mystic Law.

In this letter, Nichiren directly addresses the foremost concern of Tokimitsu, opening the young man’s eyes to the greatness of Buddhism and teaching him how to live as a person of wisdom.

When the four virtues—starting with the Taoist and Confucian teaching of being good to one’s parents and evolving into a code of conduct for worthies and sages—are regarded anew from the perspective of the supreme teaching of the Lotus Sutra, they can all be regarded as actions of Buddhas in daily life. This includes such things as smiling at our mother to reassure her, winning the trust of others at our workplace, respecting our friends and treating our juniors with compassion.

The Mystic Law is the great teaching that leads not only our parents, to whom we owe a profound debt, but also our siblings, our friends and all those in our lives to happiness that will endure throughout the three existences of past, present and future. Even if our parents and friends don’t understand our Buddhist practice now, the beneficial power of the Mystic Law is absolute. If we ourselves strive earnestly in faith, we will definitely be able to lead those around us to enlightenment, just as the sun rises in the sky and brightly illuminates all on earth. There is no need to fret or to rush things.

Some families have no children. But all the children in the Soka Gakkai are our children, our successors in our kosen-rufu movement. Be positive and confident that your encouragement to these youthful successors will be a source of strength for them and will shine in their lives as treasures of the heart.

(Excerpted from the October 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 28–31)

1. The four debts of gratitude discussed by Nichiren in this letter are based on those enumerated in the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra. The definition of the four debts of gratitude varies somewhat according to the source. In addition, the four debts of gratitude listed by the Daishonin in his treatise “On Repaying Debts of Gratitude” comprise the debts owed to one’s parents, one’s teacher, the three treasures and one’s sovereign (see WND-1, 728). In this latter case, the debt to one’s teachers is believed to have been included as an expression of Nichiren’s appreciation for his deceased teacher, Dozen-bo.

2. Mount Sumeru is the mountain that stands at the center of the world in ancient Indian cosmology.

3. “The Parable of the Medicinal Herbs,” the fifth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, states, “Once these living beings have heard the Law, they will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences” (LSOC, 136).

4. The five periods are (1) the Flower Garland period, (2) the Agama period, (3) the Correct and Equal period, (4) the Wisdom period and (5) the Lotus and Nirvana period.

5. The four virtues are (1) filial piety toward one’s father and mother; (2) loyalty to one’s lord; (3) courtesy toward one’s friends; and (4) pity and kindness toward those less fortunate than oneself.
“Flowering and Bearing Grain”
Achieving Kosen-rufu Through the Shared Commitment of Mentor and Disciple

It is said that, if a teacher has a good disciple, both will gain the fruit of Buddhahood, but if a teacher fosters a bad disciple, both will fall into hell.

If teacher and disciple are of different minds, they will never accomplish anything. I will elaborate on this point later. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 909)

The Victory of the Disciple Is the Victory of the Teacher

Although [Nichiren Daishonin’s teacher] Dozen-bo had attempted to return to his faith in the Lotus Sutra after Nichiren had rebuked his slander of the Law, he died without completely giving up his attachment to the Nembutsu practice. But if a disciple such as the Daishonin were to attain Buddhahood through practicing the correct teaching, then through that benefit, it would also be possible for Dozen-bo to attain enlightenment, as well. This is what Nichiren is describing when he writes, “If a teacher has a good disciple, both will gain the fruit of Buddhahood.”

By the same token, however, a “bad disciple,” one who has been led astray by erroneous teachings, will not be able to attain Buddhahood, nor lead the teacher to enlightenment. As a result, as the Daishonin writes, both the disciple and the teacher “will fall into hell” (WND-1, 909).

In another writing, he also states, “If lay believers and their teacher pray with differing minds, their prayers will be as futile as trying to kindle a fire on water” (“The Eight Winds,” WND-1, 795). The unchanging rule for victory in Nichiren Buddhism is for mentor and disciple to unite in spirit and align in purpose, like two interlocking gears.

Above all, Nichiren followed the path of a genuine disciple, of a “good disciple” who was also able to guide his teacher to Buddhahood. The victory of the disciple is the victory of the teacher. The disciple is critical in determining the result.

In the writing “Flowering and Bearing Grain,” the Daishonin not only describes his own spirit as a disciple, but also seeks to encourage his seniors Joken-bo and Gijo-bo, who shared Dozen-bo as their teacher, to also be good disciples able to lead their teacher to Buddhahood.

In my own youth, I deeply took to heart this important passage that we are discussing in this section, as have many SGI members throughout the world.
As long as he lived, Josei Toda remained a true disciple of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. When he spoke of Mr. Makiguchi, a grave expression came over Mr. Toda’s face. “Disciples have to follow the path of disciples,” he said, stressing that disciples need to put their mentor’s teachings into action in their own lives. He was also uncompromising toward those who tried to destroy this infinitely precious realm of mentor and disciple in Buddhism. He strictly emphasized that we must never allow anyone to harm the pure realm of faith of those dedicated to kosen-rufu. It was his solemn injunction that we protect the realm of mentor and disciple.

The mentor-disciple relationship is the core foundation of Nichiren Buddhism. This is because the profound, powerful and beautiful life-to-life interaction that takes place within the mentor-disciple relationship enables us to break free from our attachments to our small lesser selves and realize a state of life based on our boundless greater selves.

The Great Path of Mentor and Disciple

When mentor and disciple are united, they can achieve anything and always be victorious. The path of mentor and disciple is the great path for absolute victory.

The Buddha is a teacher who has realized a profound inner transformation [based on the ultimate truth of the Mystic Law]. In the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni says, “At the start I took a vow, hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us” (The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras, p. 70).

This, in other words, is the great vow to enable all people to attain Buddhahood. The unfolding drama of disciples standing up to realize this vow of the Buddha is indeed the central theme of the Lotus Sutra. The widespread propagation of the Law—the movement for kosen-rufu—is an unceasing, momentous struggle to elevate all humanity to the same life state as the Buddha.

Throughout his writings, Nichiren Daishonin frequently uses the expressions “Nichiren’s disciples” or “my disciples.” The path of kosen-rufu entails standing up with a profound sense of mission as a disciple of the Daishonin. It is the noble spiritual struggle to bring about an inner transformation in the lives of all humanity through the process of human revolution in an age steeped in the three poisons, and racked by endless conflict and tragedy. This struggle will eventually bring about a change in the life state of humanity as a whole and, with it, also a change in the destiny of the world.

(Excerpted from the December 2012 Living Buddhism, pp. 28–29)
The Lineage and Tradition of Buddhist Humanism

The Soka Gakkai is a religious organization that practices Buddhist teachings originating from Shakyamuni Buddha in India, and carried on and developed by the Indian Buddhist scholars Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, who were revered as bodhisattvas; the Great Teachers T’ien-t’ai and Miao-lo of China; the Great Teacher Dengyo of Japan; and Nichiren Daishonin. It maintains the orthodox lineage and tradition of Buddhist humanism that began with Shakyamuni and affirms respect for life and for all human beings.

The Soka Gakkai bases itself on the Lotus Sutra, a central scripture of Mahayana Buddhism, and engages in Buddhist practice and activities adapted to modern times. It carries on the fundamental spirit of the Lotus Sutra as taught and exemplified by Nichiren Daishonin through his life and actions.

Shakyamuni

Shakyamuni was born a prince in ancient India. His birthplace, Lumbini, is located in what is today Nepal. In his youth, Shakyamuni witnessed the unavoidable sufferings of existence—birth, aging, sickness and death. Though still young and in good health, he realized that he, too, would someday experience them. He decided to leave his home and embark on a spiritual quest to find a solution to these fundamental sufferings.

As a prince, Shakyamuni had led a life of great comfort and ease such that most people would envy. But when he became aware that the riches and luxuries people sought in life were ultimately fleeting and empty, he could find in them no real pleasure. This led him to search for a philosophy or teaching that would clarify the true meaning of human existence.

Buddha—The Awakened One

Shakyamuni was not satisfied with either the traditional spiritual teachings of India or the new schools of thought and belief that had become prevalent at that time. He sought instead, through the practice of meditation, to discover the fundamental causes and solutions to life’s sufferings. In this way, he awakened to the eternal and universal Dharma, or Law, that pervades all life and the universe.

The name Shakyamuni is an honorific title meaning “sage of the Shakyas”—Shakya is the name of the clan to which he belonged and muni means “sage.” The title Buddha, by which he came to be universally known, means “awakened one.”

The Law to which Shakyamuni awakened became the core of the Buddhist teachings.
The Wisdom to Realize the Inherent Dignity of Life

Shakyamuni declared that people’s ignorance of the inherent dignity of their own lives results in their being ruled by egoism. This causes them to be consumed by immediate, selfish desires and driven to seek their own happiness at the expense of others. He taught, therefore, that the noblest and most admirable way for people to live with true dignity is to awaken to the eternal and universal Law within them, and return to their original pure state of life that is free of fundamental ignorance or darkness.

The Buddha’s teaching in this regard amounted to what might be called a “restoration of the value of the human being.” It stressed how important it is for people to regain the supreme dignity of their lives and realize their infinite potential by bringing forth their inherent wisdom.

The Compassion to Respect All People

By awakening people to the value and dignity of their own lives, Shakyamuni taught them to understand and respect the value and dignity of others’ lives as well. This is the basic spirit of Buddhist compassion.

Shakyamuni once explained to a certain king that all individuals hold themselves most dear, and that, therefore, those who love themselves should not harm others.

Compassion as taught in Buddhism means to understand that others are as important and precious as we are and, as such, we should treasure them as we would treasure ourselves. It is a teaching of mutual understanding and respect.

The Lotus Sutra—The Essence of Mahayana Buddhism

Shakyamuni expounded his teachings for some fifty years, and after his death, his disciples compiled records of his words and actions. Those containing the Buddha’s main doctrinal teachings came to be known as “sutras.” Among all his teachings, those pertaining to compassion and wisdom are the focus of the Mahayana sutras. And preeminent among these is the Lotus Sutra, which has been extolled as “the king of sutras” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 3).

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha says that, by expounding it, he has fulfilled the wish he has held since the remote past to elevate all people to the same life state as his own. Further, he repeatedly calls upon countless disciples to inherit and share that eternal wish, or vow, and carry out the practice of compassion in order to fulfill it.

Nichiren Daishonin—The Votary of the Lotus Sutra

Centuries following Shakyamuni, in Japan, Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82) committed himself to putting an end to the evils obstructing people’s happiness. He regarded the suffering of all people as his own and, in a time of great social turmoil, sought to find a way to relieve that suffering. He vowed to identify and carry on the Buddhist teachings capable of realizing genuine happiness and dignity for all people. He studied the commentaries and writings of earlier Buddhist scholars, while also carefully reading and examining on his own the many Buddhist sutras. As a result of his studies, he found the answer he had been searching for in the Lotus Sutra, which teaches the way for all people to give expression to their unlimited potential and bring it to life in society.
Based on these principles of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin strongly resolved to help all people realize true happiness and dignity, and to actualize peace and security in society. He encountered life-threatening persecution by the authorities and fierce opposition from among the populace, owing to their lack of understanding of the correct teaching of Buddhism and their mistaken attachment to old ways of thinking. However, none of this deterred him in the least. He continued to take action as a votary of the Lotus Sutra in exact accord with the teachings of the sutra, encouraging and revitalizing the people, even at the risk of his life.

Nichiren Daishonin established the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-reng-kyo, and he inscribed the Gohonzon as the object of faith, or devotion. By identifying, revealing and establishing the teaching that is the essence of the Lotus Sutra, he opened the way for all people to attain Buddhahood.

In his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin asserts that peace and social prosperity are indispensable to building individual happiness. He writes:

If the nation is destroyed and people’s homes are wiped out, then where can one flee for safety? If you care anything about your personal security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not? (WND-1, 24)

The focus of Nichiren’s lifelong efforts was establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land—that is, establishing the philosophy of respect for the dignity of life as society’s guiding principle and building a world where people can live in peace and security.

This accords with efforts that practitioners of Buddhism have made since the time of Shakyamuni, to overcome the destructive nature of egoism that inflicts so much harm and suffering on people and society. It marked a new humanistic approach based on the fundamental spirit of Buddhism to enable people to realize happiness for themselves and for others—one that sought to foster trust, value creation and harmony.

Key to this process was dialogue grounded in reason and humanity.
The Soka Gakkai—Bringing Nichiren Buddhism to Life in Modern Times

Through their selfless efforts, the Soka Gakkai’s three founding presidents—Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda—revived the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Daishonin in modern times.

Soka Gakkai members engage in a variety of activities based on the guidance of the three founding presidents. On a personal level, while challenging themselves in all areas of life, they use the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to reflect deeply on their lives and bring forth the hope and courage to deal with problems they encounter. In addition, they strive to develop rich character based on a solid commitment to humanistic values. This is the practice of human revolution.

Through everyday conversations with fellow members and attending Soka Gakkai meetings, members also deepen their understanding of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings and SGI President Ikeda’s guidance, share experiences in faith, and encourage and support one another.

In addition, they talk with friends and acquaintances about the principles and ideals of Buddhism and how their Buddhist practice has enriched their lives. In this way, they spread understanding and support for the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism and the humanistic activities of the Soka Gakkai, while expanding the network of those who embrace faith in the Mystic Law.

The Westward Transmission of Buddhism and Worldwide Kosen-rufu

The practice of Nichiren Buddhism aims to enable people to realize happiness both for themselves and for others. It also places importance on individuals contributing to their communities as good citizens and becoming indispensable people whom others can trust and count on by fulfilling their roles at home, at work and in society.

The Soka Gakkai is also actively engaged in addressing the global issues facing humanity today. Through its international antinuclear weapons exhibitions and initiatives in support of refugees, it highlights the importance of peace, respect for the dignity of life and human rights. Also, through exhibitions on environmental themes, it aims to promote awareness of the need for efforts to protect the global environment.

The Soka Gakkai rediscovered the tradition of humanistic philosophy and practice originating with Shakyamuni and inherited by Nichiren Daishonin, recognizing and treasuring it as the very quintessence of Buddhism. In addition, the Soka Gakkai is carrying on this tradition and spirit in today’s society and, through its activities and initiatives, working to pass them on to future generations.

Through dialogue aimed at deepening mutual understanding and providing inspiration, we of the Soka Gakkai strive continually to cultivate and empower many able individuals who can, in their respective roles and fields, exemplify Buddhist humanism. This movement, which aims to realize the happiness of humanity as well as world peace, is called kosen-rufu.

Buddhism, which began in India, traveled eastward to Japan. Now it is being transmitted back westward, spreading not only to the countries of Asia and India but throughout the entire world. This is referred to as the “westward transmission” or “westward return” of Buddhism. Today, our humanistic Buddhist movement has spread to 192 countries and territories around the globe.

This article is from the study series “The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism for the New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu” by the Soka Gakkai Study Department.
The following workbook questions serve as a great tool for preparing for the January 2018 Essentials Exam, Part 3. The exam itself will consist of 20 multiple-choice questions that will be based on these 40 workbook questions. And all the answers to the workbook questions can be found on the pages indicated within this study guide.

Section I. Buddhist Terms

**Human Revolution** (Essentials Exam, Part 3, Study Guide, pp. 6–7)

1. There are many ways to describe the idea of “human revolution.” How does the article describe human revolution from the perspectives of attaining Buddhahood, lesser self versus greater self and the Ten Worlds?

2. In the mentor and disciple relationship, rather than simply mimicking the mentor or seeking the mentor’s approval, what essentially drives the disciple?

3. What well-known statement is cited from SGI President Ikeda’s novel *The Human Revolution* that refers to the impact one person’s human revolution can have on all humanity?
**Many In Body, One In Mind** (Study Guide, pp. 8–9)

4. In his writing “Many in Body, One in Mind,” what does Nichiren Daishonin say can be achieved when people act based on the spirit of many in body, one in mind?

5. What does “many in body” refer to?

6. What does being “one in mind” mean?

7. What analogy does President Ikeda use to describe the relationship between the oneness of mentor and disciple, and the spirit of many in body, one in mind? And what does he say about these two relationships that are essential to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism?

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**Changing Poison Into Medicine** (Study Guide, pp. 10–11)

8. How can the difference between the Lotus Sutra and pre-Lotus Sutra teachings be explained based on the following Buddhist principles?

   A. the attainment of Buddhahood by persons of the two vehicles
B. the attainment of Buddhahood in one’s present form

C. earthly desires are enlightenment

D. the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana

9. What are the three paths and the three virtues? In relation to these two concepts, and according to Nichiren, what does it mean to change poison into medicine?

10. What does “changing poison into medicine” mean when applied to our daily lives?

The Eternity of Life (Study Guide, pp. 12–13)

11. What does President Ikeda say is “the only way to awaken to life’s eternity”?
12. In his writing “Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light,” what does Nichiren say about his disciple who has passed away?

13. What does Nichiren state in “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life” about those who chant Nam-myoho-ренge-kyo in their final moments?

The Nine Levels of Consciousness (Study Guide, pp. 14–15)

14. What is said to occur at the seventh level of consciousness?

15. The eighth level of consciousness, also called the alaya-consciousness, is the “karmic storehouse” where latent causes and effects resulting from all of one’s thoughts, words and deeds throughout time reside. In contrast to traditional Buddhist views, how does Nichiren say we can change our karma for the better?

16. In “Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light,” Nichiren teaches, “You should base your mind on the ninth consciousness, and carry out your practice in the six consciousnesses.” What does this mean?
**Buddhist Compassion** (Study Guide, pp. 16–17)

17. What do the two Chinese characters comprising *jihi*—the Japanese term for “compassion”—mean?

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18. What does second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda say about courage and compassion?

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19. For Nichiren Buddhists, what is “the primary practical means for awakening and giving expression to true compassion”?

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20. To favor certain people over others is a natural human tendency. But how does a Buddha view all people when it comes to relieving their suffering and leading them to Buddhahood?

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II. SGI President Ikeda’s Lecture Series: “Learning From Nichiren’s Writings: The Teachings for Victory”


21. In this writing, Nichiren states that he was the first person in the Latter Day of the Law to reveal the Gohonzon, which even great teachers of Buddhism before him were unable to express. What phrase does Nichiren use in describing this “great mandala”?

22. In his lecture on this writing, President Ikeda says the Gohonzon “is a perfect manifestation” of three important principles elucidated in the Lotus Sutra’s Ceremony in the Air. What are these three principles?

23. In his lecture on this writing, President Ikeda says: “The Gohonzon . . . includes without exception ‘all the various beings’ of the Ten Worlds. It is a representation of the ‘mutual possession of the Ten Worlds,’ the principle that all living beings, when illuminated by the light of the Mystic Law, can display the ‘dignified attributes that they inherently possess’” (WND-1, 832). In short, what does this mean?
24. What are the four debts of gratitude discussed in this letter?

25. What does President Ikeda say that repaying our debt to the nation’s ruler means today?

26. What are the “three treasures” of Buddhism?

27. According to Nichiren, the Lotus Sutra is the only sutra that enables one to truly repay all four debts of gratitude. Which benchmark teaching does Nichiren use to come to this conclusion?

28. When Nichiren writes, “If a teacher has a good disciple, both will gain the fruit of Buddhahood,” what is he describing in terms of his relationship with his mentor, Dozen-bo?
29. The mentor-disciple relationship is the core foundation of Nichiren Buddhism. In his lecture, how does President Ikeda explain this relationship from the standpoint of our lesser selves and greater selves?

30. With respect to the great vow and life state of the Buddha, how does President Ikeda describe kosen-rufu?
III. History

The Lineage and Tradition of Buddhist Humanism
(Study Guide, pp. 33–36)

31. What is the lineage of the scholars and teachers throughout the ages that have shaped the teachings and practices of Buddhist humanism that the Soka Gakkai carries out today?

32. What prompted Shakyamuni to leave his life as a prince and embark on a spiritual quest? What did he realize about his life of comfort and ease? And what was he searching for?

33. Since becoming awakened to the eternal and universal Law that pervades all life and the universe, what did Shakyamuni teach as being core for leading the noblest and most admirable way of life?

34. Which sutra is preeminent among the Mahayana sutras?
35. What did Nichiren Daishonin do to open the way for all people to attain Buddhahood?

36. As a votary of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin continued to take action in exact accord with the teachings of the sutra, even at the risk of his own life. What was the focus of his lifelong efforts?

37. In his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” Nichiren asserts that peace and social prosperity are indispensable to building individual happiness. This message is encapsulated in what passage?

38. Through their selfless efforts, the Soka Gakkai’s three founding presidents revived the ____________________ in modern times. List the names of the three presidents.

39. The very quintessence of Buddhism that originated with Shakyamuni and was inherited by Nichiren Daishonin was rediscovered by the Soka Gakkai. What is that tradition and how is the Soka Gakkai carrying on this tradition today?
40. Explain the westward transmission of Buddhism.
The following are excerpts from SGI President Ikeda’s lecture titled “The Buddhist Study of the Soka Gakkai: Elevating People’s Life State.”

**When**

Josei Toda was rebuilding the Soka Gakkai after World War II, he often said the reason that the other top Soka Gakkai leaders quit the organization when they were arrested by the wartime militarist authorities was that they lacked a foundation in Buddhist study.

After the war, Mr. Toda devoted himself wholeheartedly to promoting the study of Nichiren Buddhism in order to foster disciples who would remain undaunted in the face of any persecution or opposition.

Addressing members who didn’t feel the need for Buddhist study, he said:

I hear that some of you say, “As long as I can receive benefit, I’m happy; I don’t care about studying Buddhism.” That’s absurd. Buddhist study strengthens and increases your faith, which produces benefit.

Nichiren Buddhism teaches the four powers [the power of the Buddha, the power of the Law, the power of faith and the power of practice]. The power of the Buddha and the power of the Law increase in proportion to the strength of the power of faith and the power of practice. Therefore, bringing forth the powers of the Buddha and the Law in your life depends on the powers of your own faith and practice. The latter merge to become the powers of the Buddha and the Law, resulting in benefits that seem miraculous, defying comprehension.

It is the power of faith that enables us to freely tap the great and inexhaustible benefit of the Gohonzon. And Buddhist study is the means by which we strengthen our power of faith.

Through deepening our understanding of Nichiren Buddhism, we can transform questions and doubts into clarity, which in turn intensifies our prayers. When we truly come to appreciate how wonderful this Buddhism is, our prayers will be filled with gratitude. When we have unshakable conviction that our desires will be fulfilled, our prayers will overflow with joy.

In other words, by strengthening our faith through Buddhist study, our prayers will be filled with gratitude and joy, enabling us to tap, freely and powerfully, the benefit of the Gohonzon. (August 2017 *Living Buddhism* p. 47)

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**Nichiren**

Daishonin writes: “Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 386). Faith is expressed as concrete efforts in practice and study.

“To the best of your ability” means exerting yourself to the fullest. There is no need to feel hesitant about talking to others about Buddhism because you’re not good at Buddhist study. For instance, you could just share some words from Nichiren that you find moving or something you learned through your Buddhist practice. Or you can tell someone, even with just a few words, that practicing Nichiren Buddhism is enjoyable, and that it will enable them to make their wishes come true. Mr. Toda said:

Buddhist study in the Soka Gakkai entails reading the *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* with our deeds, words and thoughts. As the Daishonin quotes, “The voice carries out the work of the Buddha” (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 4). Please talk with others freely and unhesitatingly about what you’ve learned about Nichiren Buddhism. By doing so, it will eventually become part of your life.

He also said: "Simply attending study lectures or reading the writings and saying that one understands the teachings is still the realm of theory; the important thing is to exert oneself in faith and practice in accord with those teachings.

He further stressed to us that actually transforming our lives is more important than mere understanding.

Study based on the mentor-disciple spirit is the Soka Gakkai tradition. It is study for winning, providing us with the foundation to overcome obstacles by learning from the conduct of Nichiren Daishonin and summoning forth the spirit of a lion king. It is study for deepening our faith.

It is study for sharing the Mystic Law and realizing kosen-rufu, which spurs us to talk to others about the inspiration and joy we gain from studying Nichiren’s teachings.

It is study for inner transformation and human revolution, providing us with an opportunity to come into contact with the Daishonin’s spirit and confirm that we ourselves embody the Mystic Law.

Practice and study arise from faith, and faith is deepened by pursuing “the two ways of practice and study.” This is the rhythm of human revolution and kosen-rufu. (August 2017 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 49–50)