

ESSENTIALS EXAM 2020



The following workbook serves as a study aid for those preparing for the Essentials Exam 2020, which will be based on *The Opening of the Eyes: SGI President Ikeda's Lecture Series*. Those who register for the exam will be able to take it on January 31 and February 1, 2020. Please ask your local leaders for further details.

The *Opening of the Eyes: SGI President Ikeda's Lecture Series* can be purchased for \$7.95 at SGI-USA bookstores and at <http://bookstore.sgi-usa.org>. Please note that the selection of study questions have been adapted and may differ from the study guide published in the September 2018–January 2019 issues of *Living Buddhism*.

INTRODUCTION

1. (p. 5) While “The Opening of the Eyes” was addressed to all of Nichiren Daishonin’s followers, it was specifically sent to _____.

CHAPTER 1

2. (pp. 21–22) Evident in Nichiren’s selfless dedication are the virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent of the Buddhism of sowing of the Latter Day for awakening all people of this evil age and enabling them to attain Buddhahood. Describe how he exemplified these three virtues.

A) Sovereign:

B) Teacher:

C) Parent:

3. (pp. 23–24) In “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” Nichiren writes: “A common mortal is an entity of the three bodies, and a true Buddha . . . Though it is thought that Shakyamuni Buddha possesses the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent for the sake of all of us living beings, that is not so. On the contrary, it is common mortals who endow him with the three virtues” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 384).

A) Buddhas can be endowed with the three virtues only because:

B) This statement by the Daishonin indicates a dramatic move away from:

CHAPTER 2

4. (pp. 26–27) When it comes to the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds in the actual practice of the three thousand realms teaching implicit in the “Life Span” chapter, it is specifically the principles “inclusion of the nine worlds in Buddhahood” that hold great importance.

A) The reason for focusing on this mutually inherent aspect of the nine worlds and Buddhahood is that it:

B) It clarifies that the pure and limitless life force of eternal Buddhahood can:

5. (p. 28) When people become caught up with “text” and “principle,” they inevitably become attached to the image of Shakyamuni as a Buddha adorned with superhuman features and characteristics. They then succumb to the mistaken belief of seeking to be saved from without by this Buddha. This quickly devolves into faith

characterized by an abject reliance on an absolute being. Adherents to such a belief cannot attain true enlightenment, which is achieved by manifesting the world of Buddhahood from within.

A) In contrast, the teaching hidden in the depths of the chapter focuses on:

B) And it clearly establishes the:

CHAPTER 3

6. (pp. 36–37) Shakyamuni states: “Since I attained Buddhahood, an extremely long period of time has passed. My life span is an immeasurable number of asamkhya kalpas, and during that time I have constantly abided here without ever entering extinction” (LSOC, 267–68). He also says, “Originally I practiced the bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed” (LSOC, 268).

The life state of Buddhahood (_____) is ever-abiding and eternal, and the life state of the nine worlds in which one practices the bodhisattva way (_____) is _____.

7. (p. 37) In fact, the “Life Span” chapter explains that the Buddha, even after becoming enlightened in the remote past, has ceaselessly pursued the bodhisattva way . . . Here, the true aspect of the Buddha becomes clear through Shakyamuni, in the “Life Span” chapter, casting off the transient and revealing the true.

A) This true identity, if you will, is that of:

B) From the perspective of this Buddha of the “Life Span” chapter, the reality of the nine worlds represents:

C) In addition, this Buddha regards those suffering amid the reality of the nine worlds as:

8. (p. 38) The Buddha, though having secured the life state of Buddhahood, continues to struggle steadfastly in the reality of the nine worlds to lead living beings to enlightenment. For this Buddha, life states of the nine worlds that are steeped in suffering and sorrow function to help others attain Buddhahood.

A) Ordinarily, suffering and sorrow tend to lead people to:

B) But when these are experienced in a life state of the nine worlds endowed with beginningless Buddhahood, they can:

CHAPTER 4

9. (pp. 45–46) Some religions and philosophies do not recognize the principle of causality, while some expound that everything happens by chance. Still, others explain that everything is predetermined or that nature or a deity controls human destiny.

A) Buddhism, the “internal way,” however, teaches that:

B) The reason that we can calmly accept the concept of the strict law of cause and effect operating in our lives is that:

C) For us to keep making efforts to become happy, we need to know that:

10. (pp. 46–47) Hinayana teachings aim to enable people to free themselves from earthly desires, which are the cause of suffering, and attain nirvana through carrying out practices such as upholding precepts and engaging in meditation.

A) In contrast, the Mahayana teachings, instead of urging the elimination of earthly desires, state that:

B) This is the principle of:

11. (p. 49)

A) Nichiren left us the Gohonzon, in which he faithfully depicts:

B) With the Gohonzon as our mirror and Nichiren as our model, we can:

CHAPTER 5

12. (p. 51) Please complete the following passage from “The Opening of the Eyes”:

“I, Nichiren, am the only person in all Japan who understands this [that the other Buddhist schools proffer slanderous teachings and cause people to fall into the evil paths of existence]. But if I utter so much as a word concerning it, then parents, brothers, and teachers will surely censure me, and the ruler of the nation will take steps against me. On the other hand, I am fully aware that if I do not speak out I will be lacking in compassion. I have considered which course to take in the light of the teachings of the Lotus and Nirvana sutras. If I remain silent, _____

_____. If I speak out, _____. But of these two courses, surely _____.” (WND-1, 239)

13. (p. 53) Slander of the Law means denigrating the correct teaching, and it arises from disbelief in that teaching. “Correct teaching” indicates the Lotus Sutra, which expounds the enlightenment of all people. The sutra teaches that each of us, without exception, can attain Buddhahood.

A) But this is difficult for many people to accept because:

B) People’s actual life experience has also made it make it difficult to believe in their potential for Buddhahood. Amid trying circumstances, they:

C) When things are going smoothly, however, and people seem already happy, they:

CHAPTER 6

14. (p. 61) In the Latter Day, when society abounds with slander of the Law—

A) What happens?

B) This is because:

C) Consequently, there is:

15. (p. 63) Please complete the following passage from “The Opening of the Eyes”:

“When it comes to understanding the Lotus Sutra, _____

_____ . But as regards _____

I believe they would hold me in awe.” (WND-1, 242)

16. (p. 65) The principle of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma” is the logical conclusion of the Buddhist concept of transforming one’s karma.

A) Simply put, it represents a way of life in which:

B) Everything that happens in our lives has meaning. Moreover, the Buddhist way of life is to:

C) This is not just a matter of mere outlook. Changing the world starts by:

CHAPTER 7

17. (p. 70) Nichiren provides answers to his doubt about not receiving protection from the Buddhist gods from various perspectives. The main point he makes is that the heavenly deities fail to lend him their protection because they have abandoned the country on account of its being steeped in slander.

A) However, this is still just a partial answer. The true answer is:

B) In other words, the issue is not:

18. (p. 76) We can find the object of devotion—which serves as a mirror and guide in our Buddhist practice for attaining enlightenment—in the life of the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

In discussing the protection extended by the persons of the two vehicles, bodhisattvas and others, Nichiren proclaims his view that:

CHAPTER 8

19. (pp. 79–80) The three pronouncements of the “Treasure Tower” chapter represent three viewpoints Shakyamuni expresses on the importance of spreading the Lotus Sutra after his passing, each accompanied with a call to the gathered bodhisattvas to shoulder this mission. What are the three pronouncements?

A) In the first pronouncement, Shakyamuni declares his wish to entrust:

B) In the second pronouncement Shakyamuni indicates that the reason all Buddhas of the ten directions have gathered at the assembly of the Lotus Sutra in the saha world is to:

C) In the third pronouncement, Shakyamuni sets forth the “six difficult and nine easy acts.” Explaining how difficult:

20. (p. 83) According to the Great Teacher Dengyo, “To discard the shallow and seek the profound is the way of a person of courage.”

A) “To seek the profound” refers to:

B) Viewed in terms of human life, “shallow” means:

C) “The way of a person of courage” means:

D) The inner battle to either _____ takes place in our hearts many times each day.

CHAPTER 9

21. (pp. 87–88) We can identify three main points in Nichiren’s explanation of the two admonitions in this treatise.

A) First, Devadatta—an evil person and icchantika—is predicted to attain Buddhahood . . . Then, the dragon girl—a young female who suffered discrimination in society and in the religious tenets and customs of Shakyamuni’s time—swiftly gives an actual demonstration of her ability to attain Buddhahood. This highlights the fact that:

B) Second, as a doctrinal basis for the teaching of universal enlightenment, the Daishonin emphasizes the “immediate attainment of Buddhahood that is based on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life” (WND-1, 269) . . . In the case of evil people attaining enlightenment, he explains this power lies in:

In the case of women attaining enlightenment, this power, he explains, lies in:

C) Third, by expounding that evil people and women can attain Buddhahood, Nichiren also opens the way to:

22. (p. 92) Nichiren Daishonin writes that poison refers to the three paths—earthly desires, karma and suffering—while medicine indicates the three virtues—the Dharma body, wisdom and emancipation.

A) Changing poison into medicine, he explains, is the principle whereby:

B) The life of an ordinary person engaged in a cycle of cause and effect based on the three paths is:

CHAPTER 10

23. (pp. 96–97) Nichiren Daishonin wrote: “On the twelfth day of the ninth month of last year [1271, on the occasion of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution], between the hours of the rat and the ox (11:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m.), this person named Nichiren was beheaded. It is his soul that has come to this island of Sado and, in the second month of the following year, snowbound, is writing this to send to his close disciples” (WND-1, 269).

A) In writing “this person named Nichiren was beheaded,” he is declaring that that his status up to that time—in which he conducted himself as an ordinary person—

B) The Daishonin is indicating here that at Tatsunokuchi he:

C) He uses the word *soul* to refer to:

D) His soul, he says, has come to Sado. This represents a declaration of:

24. (p. 99) Who are the “three powerful enemies” and what are their characteristics?

A) The first enemy is:

B) The second enemy is:

C) The third enemy is:

CHAPTER 11

25. (pp. 103, 106, 107–09) Three times in the course of “The Opening of the Eyes,” Nichiren Daishonin cites the Great Teacher Miao-lo of China as saying: “The third [group] is the most formidable of all. This is because [the second and the third ones are] increasingly harder to recognize for what they really are” (WND-1, pp. 270, 275, 277).

A) The Daishonin says that the extreme evil that characterizes arrogant false sages can only be recognized by:

B) What does this mean?

C) In Nichiren’s time, who functioned as the arrogant false sage?

26. (p. 111) Nichiren writes, “The Buddha and Devadatta are like a form and its shadow—in lifetime after lifetime, they are never separated” (WND-1, 278) and “Prince Shotoku and his archenemy Moriya appeared at the same time, like the blossom and calyx of the lotus” (WND-1, 278).

A) When evil flourishes and good is defeated:

B) When good flourishes and evil is defeated:

C) What takes place in our lives at every moment?

D) Accordingly, the only way to strengthen good is to:

CHAPTER 12

27. (p. 117) The law of cause and effect is central to Buddhism.

A) Present effects are due to karmic causes from the past. But the causes we make in the present:

B) In fact, the Daishonin emphasizes that:

C) In explaining karma, Nichiren's purpose is always to:

28. (p. 120)

A) Why are votaries of the sutra destined to suffer hardships?

B) Such difficulties, however, serve to:

C) Because the votaries wage such a struggle, they attain:

CHAPTER 13

29. (pp. 124–25) Please complete the following passage from "The Opening of the Eyes":

"This I will state. _____
_____ for the sake of the Law." (WND-1, 280)

A) In this passage, beginning with "This I will state . . .," the Daishonin reveals:

B) It shows his:

C) As far as Nichiren is concerned, there is something more important than whether we receive the protection of the heavenly deities. And that is:

30. (p. 124, 130) Please complete the following passage from “The Opening of the Eyes”:

“I will be the _____ of Japan. I will be the _____ of Japan. I will be the _____ of Japan. This is my _____, and _____!” (WND-1, 281).

A) In any time and place, a kosen-rufu movement always begins with the:

B) With that spirit, we can:

CHAPTER 14

31. (p. 136) Nichiren discerned the root cause of all evil karma accumulated from past existences, which creates suffering and misfortune in this present lifetime.

A) He said it stems from:

B) Accordingly, he clearly apprehended that:

32. (p. 139) In the course of striving steadily as practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, the negative impulses in our lives to disregard the Law are driven out, and we can defeat our fundamental darkness.

A) Specifically, this refers to:

B) Negative influences and so-called evil friends function to:

C) Our battle against such negative forces is a:

CHAPTER 15

33. (p. 143) Please complete the following passage from “The Opening of the Eyes”:

“Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, _____
_____.

Do not have doubts simply because _____
_____. Do not be discouraged because _____
_____. This is what I have
taught my disciples morning and evening, and yet they _____
_____ when the crucial moment comes” (WND-1, 283).

34. (p. 147) While it is true that all living beings are entities of the Mystic Law whose lives are inherently endowed with the state of Buddhahood, we cannot manifest the world of Buddhahood in our lives unless we:

A) It is not something we can hope to achieve if we are:

B) In short, this struggle means:

C) The daimoku that the Daishonin spread could be described as:

CHAPTER 16

35. (pp. 154–55) Nichiren refuted the doctrines of the Nembutsu and Zen schools of his day as slander of the Law for their encouraging people to discard the Lotus Sutra. Many people no doubt felt that it was not very “Buddhist” of him to censure and attack other schools. The real underlying problem here is the deep and pervasive misconceptions about Buddhism that existed in society.

A) The essence of Buddhism, in a sense, is not to seek the placid existence of a still pond but to:

B) Building genuine happiness for oneself and others necessarily entails:

C) In response to the criticism that shakubuku involves “a contentious heart” and leads to one falling into “the realm of asuras,” Nichiren explains that:

36. (p. 160) Hypocrisy is the exact opposite of compassion—especially, the hypocrisy of knowing when wrong is being committed in the realm of Buddhism but doing nothing to address it. If such hypocrisy prevails, lies and pretense will become the norm and no one will speak the truth.

A) This will ultimately lead to:

B) Shakubuku, an act of supreme compassion, is a:

C) And it is powered by:

CHAPTER 17

37. (p. 162) Please complete the following passage from “The Opening of the Eyes”:

“I, Nichiren, am _____
_____ of Japan.” (WND-1, 287)

(p. 165) The passage above clarifies that the Daishonin’s practice as the votary of the Lotus Sutra embodies the three virtues as an expression of the compassion of the Buddha expounded in the Lotus Sutra.

A) In terms of Nichiren’s practice, what corresponds to the virtue of sovereign?

B) What corresponds to the virtue of parent?

C) What does the virtue of teacher derive from?

CHAPTER 18

38. (p. 171)

A) "Sowing the seed of Buddhahood" is a figurative expression for:

B) After the seed has been planted by the sower:

C) It is wrong, however, to interpret this to mean that the seed of Buddhahood does not exist in people's lives unless it is first planted there by the Buddha. The truth is that:

39. (p. 172–73) Nichiren writes, "If Nichiren's compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity" ("On Repaying Debts of Gratitude," WND-1, 736).

A) The eternity of the three virtues derives from the universality of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, but the universality of the Law alone does not assure its eternal perpetuation. Another indispensable element is:

B) Through people's tenacious, committed efforts:

C) This is as Nichiren indicates when he says: "

_____ " (*Gosho zenshu*, p. 856).

CHAPTER 19

40. (pp. 177, 182) Please complete the following passage from "The Opening of the Eyes":

“For what I have done, I have been condemned to exile, but it is _____

In future lives I will _____
_____ gives me great joy.” (WND-1, 287)

A) Nichiren closes “The Opening of the Eyes” with the cry to his followers that now, when they are facing harsh persecution, is:

This concludes the Essentials 2020 Exam workbook.