PART I: FAMILY AND PARENTING
CHILDREN ARE TREASURES OF THE FUTURE

The following are excerpts from Daisaku Ikeda’s three-volume series on parenting *Dialogues on Mother and Child in the Twenty-first Century* (Niju-isseiki heno haha to ko o kataru), Daisanbunmeisha, Tokyo, 1999–2000).

**Children Are the Treasure of the Future**

“Children are precious treasures of the future. All children have the right to happiness. No child is without his or her precious mission. Parents are challenging themselves every day to raise their children, and their work is truly praiseworthy. To them I offer my utmost support. The twenty-first century must become an era for all parents and children to walk the great path of happiness.”

“Children are messengers from the future. We have no choice but to entrust the world to our children. I trust children; I believe in their strength to grow and develop. Every child possesses a unique mission. For this reason, I treat children with respect, and I give my all in doing so. If we are insincere with children or try to manipulate them, we will regret it later. So whenever I meet with children, I try to create happy memories for them.”

“All children are gems, full of precious potential. There is hope in every child since life itself is full of hope. Should the hopes of children be stifled or broken, that would be our responsibility as adults. It pains my heart to see what goes on in today’s society. I do not want to see the eyes of children darkened with fear and clouded with tears of sorrow. Society must be absolutely transformed. Children are mirrors that reflect adult society. When adults are ailing and their vision clouded, children will also suffer. Let us wipe away the tears of sorrow from the face of each child! We must protect children and give them courage, strength and vitality. It is parents who nurture children, the hope of humanity. How noble parents are! What a great mission and responsibility they fulfill!”

“I wish to make the twenty-first century resound with the laughter of parents and children. I wish to build a society where children, as the hope of humanity, may grow up healthy and upright. I wish to protect and encourage all parents and children, and I will do whatever I can for their sake. To protect parents and children is to protect life itself; it is to nurture peace and protect the future. Herein lies the basis of all. To this end, I am now exerting my utmost.”

**The Importance of Home and Parenting**

“Neither politics nor economy determines the happiness of humanity or the future of society—education does. Education is the foundation of all. Education is a supreme, sacred enterprise, and parenting its cornerstone.”

“The environment surrounding children could not possibly be described as decent. The material wealth of society only underscores its spiritual deprivation, like a stormy, churning sea. For this reason, home must be a safe harbor to protect children and nurture their development as upright individuals.”

“Nothing suits children better than a smile. It is heartrending to see children embroiled in painful experiences both at home and school, with nowhere to feel safe and secure. Everything is new in parenting. As more families have fewer children in this age of nuclear families, it is becoming increasingly rare for parents to have previous experience in parenting. Under such circumstances, parents’ worries are understandable, yet children may be feeling even greater insecurity. The mind of the parent is a mainstay for the mind of the child. If the parent’s mind is unstable, so is the child’s mind. The mind of the child is sensitive, acutely responsive to the parent’s mind.”

“The two Chinese characters ‘dragon’ and ‘woman’ are used to represent the Dragon King’s daughter: ‘Dragon’ refers to the father and ‘woman’ to his eight-year-old daughter. The combination of both these Chinese characters indicates the simultaneous enlightenment of the father and the daughter” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 746). This teaching has profound significance.
Applied to parenting, it signifies that parents’ efforts to nurture children’s vitality will inspire parents themselves and have a positive influence on their lives, thus enabling both parents and children to enjoy the most fulfilled lives.”

“The times now seem to move in a negative direction. The ‘me first’ attitude has become society’s general atmosphere. Education is the only means to change this direction. Above all, I believe, education at home is crucial. Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a great Swiss educator, said that home is a school of morality. There are many places to acquire knowledge or skills, but there are few places to learn about the correct way of life as a human being. Home, in my opinion, should be the foremost influence on children in refining their humanity.”

“We should not forget the debt of gratitude we owe to those who nurtured us, and, with it, we must act for the sake of our children and future generations. This is the greatest way to repay our debt of gratitude. The grateful are beautiful. To know and repay one’s debt of gratitude is the way of human beings. Those who do so will live rich lives. Those who forget their debt of gratitude, on the other hand, are arrogant and will lead miserable and lonely lives in the end.”

Parents’ Love and Sincerity

“Parents are truly precious. We, in turn, must transform our appreciation for parents into our affection for children. The bond of parent and child, after all, is yet another human relationship. What matters in the end is sincerity, not technique. Only the human heart is capable of moving the heart of another. President Toda once asked a woman, ‘Do you want to make your husband great or make him look great?’ He pointed out her innermost state of mind and then warmly encouraged her. The same holds true of parenting. Children are neither for parents’ vanity nor for their reputation. The only thing that will be communicated to the hearts and minds of children is parents’ heartfelt, affectionate desire for their healthy development.”

“I try to understand the hard work of parents as much as possible, and I appreciate them as if to join my palms in reverence for their efforts. Many parents work while taking care of homes. In the midst of their extremely busy daily lives, they still strive to spread Buddhism. Parents, like suns, illuminate homes and communities; they are the most praiseworthy people in the world. Children are intently looking at their parents’ earnest efforts. When our children ask us, ‘Which is more important, me or your work? Me or your Buddhist activities?’, we must reply to them clearly, ‘You are the most important.’ Then we must clearly and confidently explain to our children the reasons we work or engage in Buddhist activities and to what purpose we dedicate our lives for the sake of others. We must not take for granted our children’s understanding and support in this regard. Nor must we use our busy schedule as an excuse not to explain to our children about what we do. We must express our love for our children concretely. If not, even though children may intellectually understand their parents’ circumstances, they will still feel unsatisfied.”

“The love of parents showered upon the lives of young people will become their sustenance for their whole lives. Nothing surpasses earnest parents. They may make mistakes at times, or they may experience emotional outbursts. What is most important for parents, however, is to live their lives as earnestly as they can. Children grow up looking at parents. It is not parents’ words that children will hear. No matter what wonderful things parents may say to their children, if their words are not accompanied with action, children will never listen. The lives of children will be determined by how parents live their lives. The love of parents and their way of life will be etched in the children’s innermost hearts and become the source of energy, like magma, to support the rest of their lives.”

“The more children we have, the more difficulty we face in terms of how to treat each child. In this regard, it is important to change the way we usually think. For example, if we have four children, instead of dividing our affection into four equal parts, we may try to expand our love four times to embrace each of them.”

“Parents are willing to do anything possible for their children’s sake. The love of parents is vaster than the sky and deeper than the ocean. Parents’ feelings will definitely be communicated to children, though it may take time. Nichiren Daishonin states, ‘For example, when the chick pecks the egg from inside, not only does its mother peck likewise, but they both
peck at the same place. This is because thoughts and feelings are responsive’ (Gosho Zenshu, p. 810). When parents do their very best, their children will respond accordingly. The parents’ love and compassion will no doubt bring out their children’s vibrant spirit to grow and develop.”

“Parents are very precious to children. Parents are an irreplaceable mainstay for their children’s unconditional trust and peace of mind. Hermann Hesse, a German writer, wrote that the sun speaks to us with ‘light,’ and flowers with ‘fragrance and color.’ Parents’ spontaneous smiles and their unaffected bearing filter through the hearts of children like a shaft of bright light coming through the window of a dark room or the fragrance of flowers scenting the surrounding air. Gordon W. Allport, an American psychologist, pointed out that the atmosphere of homes that we create through everyday life has a great influence on children’s personal development. Children are aware that parents are busy. On this account, however, parents must not neglect children. What is important is the depth of parents’ feelings for children. Yet unless parents communicate their feelings, children would feel lonely and volatile. In spite of the limited time we have, it is important to show affection to children every day just as the sun rises every day. We must ceaselessly warm the hearts of children and pray for their development while nurturing and encouraging them.”

“Peace exists in the hearts of people who love children. The oppression of children stands in opposition to peace. It is the responsibility of adults to love children’s uninhibited life force and encourage their limitless development into the future.”

“In the present age, the egotism of adults takes precedence. Although some feign affection for their own satisfaction or vanity, fewer people act genuinely for children’s sake. The decline of children’s strength to live will no doubt lead to the decline of the entire society. The future of humanity then will remain dismal. It cannot do any good to be idle in these circumstances. I want to create an era in which children live true to themselves, running around with smile and enjoying their happiness to the fullest. This is why I have been pouring my energy into writing children’s stories.”

“What is particularly important for small children is a sense of security and intimacy. If children do not feel genuinely loved and needed, their minds may become unstable. I think that the love and affection children receive will become their source of strength for the rest of their lives.”

“Parents are truly wonderful. In many of his writings, Nichiren Daishonin praises the profound compassion and love of parents. Despite all hardships, parents dedicate their lives to protecting their children. The compassion, love and courage of parents are the greatest marks of humanity. During the Daishonin’s time, there were some women who earnestly raised their children without husbands. The Daishonin bestowed upon one of them the Buddhist name ‘Sage Nichimyo’ and encouraged her, stating, ‘So long as one maintains firm faith, one is certain to receive the great protection of the gods’ (WND, 614). Sincerely following this advice, Sage Nichimyo maintained pure faith and raised her daughter to be a splendid successor of faith, thus leading a life of great victory.”

“The impact [of child abuse] is great. Precisely for this reason, the victims must sever the chain of abuse in their generation. We cannot, however, simply conclude that the victims of child abuse will become abusers themselves. This issue needs to be analyzed and considered from various angles. The mental scars received during childhood do not disappear easily. What heals those scars is humane care and affection. In the present age, however, there are fewer places where people can heal their spiritual wounds through abundant affection. Love is lacking in many homes, schools and communities. The lack of humane interaction and various other issues now arising are symptoms of what may be termed the ‘Love-deficiency Syndrome.’”

“The greatest people in the world are parents, the hardest workers in the world are parents, and the most worthy of appreciation and applause in the world are parents. Parents give us birth and raise us, constantly working day and night. Although parents often nag us, they also protect us in times of need. Parents offer prayer upon prayer for the sake of their children and families; they are truly worthy of respect. Before any celebrities or politicians, we must praise those ordinary parents. Though no one else may do so, I offer to parents my greatest tribute and gratitude.”
“The homeland where we were born and raised is our source. In the same manner, parents are our source or our roots as human beings. Those who have forgotten their origins are like rootless grass. When we disregard our parents, we stray from the correct way of humanity. In so doing, we will not even realize that we have gone astray. When we think of our parents, we can become gentle, reviving our pure hearts. Everyone has parents; people everywhere have parents. Although some parents are no longer in this world, they still dwell in the hearts of their children. At the end of its pursuit of material wealth and economic prosperity, Japan seems fatigued, dissipated and lost; it may be described as a society that has grown oblivious to the hearts of parents. I want to revive the hearts of parents in today’s society. I want modern people to recall the profound love of parents. It may sound simplistic, but I think that if more of us were to appreciate our parents, the world would be a more peaceful and happier place. Parents raise their children with selfless love. So when we think of parents, we too become capable of working selflessly for the sake of others.”

“The mere presence of parents can give great strength to children. I ask parents to pour love upon their children like the sun nurturing sunflowers. This is because people can live powerfully for the rest of their lives with the energy of love that they received in their childhood.”

Parents Must Change First

“We must establish the correct standard of value upon the foundation of the dignity of life. Leaders of society, including politicians and schoolteachers, should teach children the distinction between good and evil and lead society in the direction of goodness. Today, however, the higher the status that people achieve, the more wrongdoings they tend to commit. Those in high status think only of their selfish interests while exploiting ordinary people. The ‘me first’ attitude prevails. Looking at those adults, children cannot possibly grow upright. Such social trends, in a sense, are destroying our children. Adults must first reflect on their own way of life. Without self-reflection, adults are not qualified to scold children.”

“When children cause trouble, adults are quick to toughen laws and regulations in order to suppress and restrict them. This way of thinking is topsy-turvy. Adults are protecting their selfish interests, thereby complicating the issue. First, leaders themselves must set good examples, dedicating their lives to support the good and battle the unjust. In the ways that adults live their lives lies the fundamental solution to the issues surrounding youth. Adults must seriously reform themselves.”

“In today’s world, adults cannot be trusted by the young people. Adult society continues to betray the pure hearts of children. Trust is the foundation of education. Unless there is a bond of trust between children and adults, no matter how much lip service adults pay to morality, children will not listen. The problem lies in adults, in their way of life.”

“Nichiren Daishonin states, ‘Mugwort that grows in the midst of hemp, or a snake inside a tube [will as a matter of course become straight], and those who associate with people of good character will consequently become upright in heart, deed, and word’ (WND, p. 1128). If we apply this passage to various influences upon children, we may say that the environment surrounding children, particularly the behaviors of adults, has a great impact on children. Parents must set good examples before nagging them to do this or that. Parents must strive to become a good, upright influence for children like hemp for mugwort. It is also important for parents to bring their children closer to ‘people of good character’ outside their own families so that children may advance in a more positive direction.”

“Becoming affluent is wonderful. Respecting children’s freedom is also important in education. There must be, however, a creed or philosophy at the center of parents’ conduct. Creed or philosophy is nothing complicated; it is what one must uphold by all means, a pillar of belief that cannot be compromised. My late mother often repeated her credo to her children, ‘Don’t cause trouble for others.’ It is regrettable that present society may be better described as chaotic rather than free. It makes no sense if we allow children to be spoiled now and then suffer later in their lives.”
“Those who have gone through hardship are more trustworthy than those who simply had a good education. Society on the whole has now become affluent, making our lives more convenient so that it is easier to satisfy children’s material desires. Ironically herein lies one of the difficulties in today’s parenting. This is why the parents’ way of life will become all the more important. The core of one’s personality is developed during one’s infancy at home. It is parents and families whom children first encounter in this world. A baby who cannot even distinguish ‘self’ from ‘other’ will gradually develop self-identity through interacting with others. How parents treat their children every day—including their voices and mannerisms—has a great impact on the minds of children.”

“Parents’ everyday conduct is the greatest form of education. Many things can be expressed through rhetoric or logic. What is most readily communicated to children, however, is the character of parents and their way of life. At school as well, the teacher’s character is the most influential element of children’s educational environment.”

Parents Working Together

“There are parents who often fight over their children’s problems, blaming one another and making matters worse. When children see their parents fighting, they are the ones who suffer most. When children cause problems, parents often deny their responsibility and simply accuse their children. But this approach does not solve anything. It is parents, not children, who need to change. Parents think that they are raising their children, yet do not realize that they are, in fact, being raised by their children.”

“The atmosphere of the home gradually seeps through the hearts of children and gives the its various colorings: bright or dark, warm or cold. Above all, the relationship of the parents has a great influence on children’s psyche. Thus it is not advisable for parents to fight bitterly in front of children. Goethe said that those who behold peace in their own homes, whether they are kings or peasants, are happy. No matter how much wealth we accumulate or how lofty the status and glory we achieve, if our homes are not peaceful, we will be lonely and miserable. For more than a half century since I joined the Soka Gakkai, I have dedicated myself to its cause without much hindrance at home. This is because I was blessed with a good, peaceful home. Peace, however, does not mean the absence of hardship or worry. No matter how stormy things may seem at times, as long as there is a sun shining in the family, all will be well. For this reason, I ask parents to shine like the sun at home. Parents’ unaffected behavior and bearing—rather than what they verbalize—will be especially engraved in the hearts of children.”

“The relationship between parents is the foundation of all human relationships within a family; it is the axis and the pillar. How parents relate to each other will have a great effect upon the growth and development of children.”

“When both parents are busy, they need to cultivate ingenuity and wisdom to improve their communication. To be a practitioner of Buddhism does not mean to become someone special; it is to work as a splendid member of society and live sincerely as a good father and husband, as a good mother and wife. If we neglect the immediate reality of our homes and families, no matter what grand ideals and theories we may talk about, our words will have no power to persuade others. It is important for both parents to make efforts to understand each other. For this reason, parents’ mutual care and consideration in everyday life, though they may seem insignificant, become indispensable.”

“Happiness is not the absence of life’s billows and blasts. No matter what may happen, as parents join their hearts and share both suffering and joy, they can deepen and solidify their bond. President Toda often said: ‘The Daishonin’s Buddhism exists for the unhappy and unfortunate. It is the religion that enables those in adversity to become happy. The more unfortunate the circumstances people face, the greater the strength they can tap as they surmount their obstacles. Only such people can become true allies and friends of the unhappy and unfortunate.’ Despite our busy schedules, we are ungrudgingly striving for the happiness of others. This is why our lives become worthy of respect and create supreme value.”

“Everyone has shortcomings. If we simply point out one another’s shortcomings and blame others, we will become hateful and discouraged. Even when our assertions may be correct,
or precisely because they are correct, our criticism at times may become unbearable for others. This is all the more true of families. I hope that parents magnanimously embrace one another’s minor shortcomings and mistakes and acknowledge one another’s strengths and merits, thus building a family full of mutual praise and encouragement. If parents are always hostile and contentious, it will cast a dark shadow upon the hearts of children. Furthermore, especially in the presence of children, parents must not badmouth each other behind the other’s back.”

Living Buddhism June 2003 p.6