The dialogue series starts with a critical look at the state of humanity, addressing the fact that, despite rapid advances in such fields as technology, scientific discoveries, and the on-going struggle for effective political strategies, humanity finds itself searching for ways to overcome a strong sense of powerlessness. The Lotus Sutra is introduced as the universal teaching that has the ability to empower all people to transform the times. SGI President Ikeda states that individual transformation is the key to establishing a world based on humanistic values.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda’s profound awakening based on the essence of the Lotus Sutra while he was imprisoned during World War II serves as a starting point for the SGI and the spread of the teaching of unparalleled equality and empowerment, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. He declared, “The Buddha is life itself.” The dialogue turns to investigating the meaning of the terms “life,” “Buddha,” and “law” as mutually inclusive entities pointing to one truth found in the Lotus Sutra.

Specifically, the Mahayana doctrines of Buddhism reveal the potential for women and others, who were previously thought unable, to attain Buddhahood. This is why the Lotus Sutra is known as the teaching that
enables all people to become Buddhas. No intermediaries are needed in that process. The overall role of religion in the twenty-first century should be one that serves the people, and the teachings of the Lotus Sutra have the ability to improve society and bring happiness to the people.

**Key Passages**

Key Passage #1

[H]umanity is now searching beyond the present for a powerful new philosophy. People are searching for something that will satisfy the spiritual emptiness they feel, something that will revive their weary lives and fill them once again with hope and vigor. Humanity is searching for the wisdom that will provide true direction and purpose to the individual and society....

We are starting to recognize that people must come first and that human growth may be what is most important. We are coming to understand that, in our information-oriented societies with their explosion of knowledge, we urgently need a matching explosion of wisdom to use that knowledge properly (WLS-1, p. 3).

• In an age rife with a prevailing sense of hopelessness, humanity is seeking a philosophy of life with the power to help society out of despair. A teaching aimed at the growth of the human being is most important for humanity.
Key Passage #2

The roots of racism run deep. Movements to fan racial hatred for political, economic or religious advantage are always with us. The seriousness of this problem lies in that it is closely tied to people’s spiritual and emotional desires. In other words we might say the desire for an identity — to know where one came from and where one is going — lies at the roots of racism. People cannot withstand a vacuum of ideas; a philosophical and ideological void drives people to seek their identity in their race. That, of course, is one of the reasons religion is important, but in reality religion often contributes to divisiveness (WLS-1, pp. 8–9).

- Seeking to find identity in race or other societal means leaves a void in the ability to connect humanity on a deeper fundamental basis. Religion must be the driving force to fill this void in the twenty-first century.

Key Passage #3

Actually, the Lotus Sutra is a scripture that shows its true brilliance in just such periods of great transition. The age in which the Lotus Sutra was first taught seems to have been similar. In Shakyamuni’s India, the growth of cities began transcending old tribal divisions, leading to a new age in which people would form new relationships and have to coexist symbiotically. It was a time of great intellectual confusion, with people espousing everything from pure materialism to hedonism to asceticism....
To bring humanity together in this period of great change, Shakyamuni taught new principles of integration. And the Lotus Sutra is the living essence of that teaching. Later in China and Japan, when religion was in chaos and people didn’t know what to believe, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai and Nichiren Daishonin advocated the Lotus Sutra’s teachings and with it boldly confronted the issues of their respective eras and societies. The Lotus Sutra, one might say, represented the banner of unity with which they charged ahead in their struggles amid periods of great spiritual turbulence (WLS-1, pp. 11–12).

- The Lotus Sutra flourishes as a teaching to bring humanity out of times of suffering and confusion, times of greatest change from one era to another.

Key Passage #4

All philosophies other than the Lotus Sutra are fragments, expressing nothing more than a partial view of the great Law of life. Basing ourselves on fragments, even though they may contain partial truths, will not enable us to realize a thoroughgoing revitalization of our lives. Indeed, philosophies that expound only partial truths end up distorting our lives. The Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, teaches the one fundamental Law that unifies all these fragmentary teachings, gives them proper perspective, and allows each to shine and fulfill its function within the whole. That is the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra (WLS-1, p. 13).
Lotus Sutra is a teaching that represents both the ultimate wisdom of the Buddha and the culmination of his body of teachings. All other teachings can be represented by Shakyamuni’s lifetime teachings. Only by basing ourselves on the teaching that brings all others together can we fully change our lives and the times.

Key Passage #5

The Lotus Sutra teaches of the great hidden treasure of the heart, as vast as the universe itself, which dispels any feelings of powerlessness. It teaches a dynamic way of living in which we breathe the immense life of the universe itself. It teaches the true great adventure of self-reformation...

The Lotus Sutra has the drama of fighting for justice against evil. It has the warmth that comforts the weary. It has the vibrant, pulsing courage that drives away fear. It has a chorus of joy at attaining absolute freedom throughout past, present and future. It has the soaring flight of liberty. It has brilliant light, flowers, greenery, music paintings, vivid stories. It offers unsurpassed lessons on psychology, the workings of the human heart; lessons on life; lessons on happiness; and lessons on peace. It maps out the basic rules for good health. It awakens us to the universal truth that a change in one’s heart can transform everything...

[In the Lotus Sutra — the king of sutras — we find a fundamental humanism in which people are the goal and purpose, in which they are...}
both protagonist and sovereign. Perhaps we could call this teaching of the Lotus Sutra a “cosmic humanism” (WLS-1, pp. 14–15).

- The Lotus Sutra is the sole teaching that expounds the power of the universe contained within life itself, which is the source of unlimited hope. It is a humanistic teaching with its focus on empowering the people.

Key Passage #6

Very simply, Mr. Toda’s enlightenment should be remembered as the moment that clearly revealed the Soka Gakkai as the true heir to the Daishonin’s Buddhism. That was the starting point of all our propagation activities and our development today, and I firmly believe it was an epoch-making event in the history of Buddhism. Mr. Toda revived Buddhism in contemporary times and made it accessible to all.

When I was younger, Mr. Toda told me about his profound experience in prison. His words left me convinced that his realization formed the religious and philosophical core of the Soka Gakkai. The truth to which he became enlightened is identical to the ultimate teaching of Nichiren Buddhism. I believe Mr. Toda’s realization opened a path out of the deadlock facing humanity. Our mission as his disciples is to extend that path in all directions and on all planes (WLS-1, p. 21).

- The Soka Gakkai’s conviction in the spread of Nichiren Buddhism started with second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda’s profound awakening in prison during World War II. By having an awakening
that became the catalyst towards the Soka Gakkai’s development, Mr. Toda uncovered the essence of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism.

Key Passage #7

**Mr. Toda drew forth his philosophy of life from the depths of the Lotus Sutra in his own desperate all-out struggle for the ultimate truth — a struggle that engaged his entire being. Indeed, his philosophy represents the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra. His philosophy, therefore, not only informs us of the nature of life but has the power to transform our way of thinking. It leads to hope and practical action. It is a philosophy of practical relevance — an “actual” philosophy that brings forth energy for living. When we faithfully translate this philosophy into practice, our personal drama of self-reformation — in which we change a life of powerlessness and despair into one of satisfaction and happiness — begins. That reformation of the individual spurs reformation on every level. It is the first turn of the wheel in the process to make humanity strong, rich and wise...**

*Human revolution is a contemporary expression for the attainment of Buddhahood for the individual, while an all-embracing revolution refers to kosen-rufu (WLS-1, pp. 26–27).*

- Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda’s realization in prison led to an understanding of the Lotus Sutra based on taking action to
transform deadlock. This action on the individual level is human revolution and on a broader scale is kosen-rufu.

Key Passage #8

*The Lotus Sutra teaches that the “one great reason” why Buddhas appear in the world — in other words, the supreme and ultimate purpose for the advent of Buddhas — is to enable all living beings to attain Buddhahood (LSOC, 64). This goal cannot be accomplished unless the teachings preached by Shakyamuni are also effective for all those living after him, particularly those in the defiled age of the Latter Day of the Law…*

*Nichiren Daishonin read the Lotus Sutra with his life, revealing and propagating Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the Law implicit in this sutra, which is designed to enable all people to become happy. The Daishonin was the first to demonstrate how to realize the ideal of the Lotus Sutra to bring happiness to all people in the Latter Day of the Law, when the Buddha’s teachings were predicted to perish (WLS-1, p. 45).*

- The Lotus Sutra was taught to enable all living beings, especially those living during the Latter Day of the Law, after the passing of Shakyamuni. Nichiren Daishonin revealed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, so that people of the Latter Day of the Law could readily tap their Buddhahood and help others do the same.

Key Passage #9
It is no outstanding distinction to simply know what your teacher has taught; what matters most is the reason or purpose for which you know those teachings. Anyone can say, “My mentor’s teachings are wonderful!” But Nikko Shonin took the next step: “Since they’re so wonderful, I must share them with others no matter what!” The five senior priests, on the other hand, thought themselves great simply because they knew of these magnificent teachings. At first glance, it may appear that they all revere and respect their mentor, but the difference between the two types of disciples is as vast as that between heaven and earth, fire and water (WLS-1, pp. 48–49).

- A true disciple takes action on their understanding of their mentor’s teaching. In contrast to the five senior priests, Nikko Shonin embodied the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin by carrying out propagation for the sake his mentor.

Key Passage #10

We have no class of professional clerics in the SGI. Our members — all of whom live in the secular world — not only study Buddhist doctrine but are responsible for propagating the Daishonin’s teachings and performing various ceremonies and religious services. Ours is a religion in which ordinary people assume full responsibility (WLS-1, p. 51).

- Buddhism as practiced by the SGI empowers ordinary people to take full responsibility for the propagation of the Daishonin’ teachings. It
is not necessary to rely on priests who have divorced themselves from the true intent of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism to do this for us.

**Questions for Discussion**

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

1. Which passages or concepts in the reading struck you most deeply?
2. Do you believe that we live in a time with a prevailing sense of hopelessness? What must we do in order to transform the age in which we live? (Refer to p. 11)
3. British philosopher Alan Watts says: “There is no ‘you’ to get something out of the universe... as the ocean ‘waves’ so the universe ‘peoples’.” How can this understanding help build human harmony? (Refer to pp. 29–30)
4. President Toda’s profound realization in prison marks an important starting point in the history of the Soka Gakkai. Do you have an experience in human revolution that felt like breaking through a deadlock and revealing your mission for kosen-rufu? (Refer to p. 21)
5. How do we move beyond simply admiring our mentor’s teachings to living and carrying on the legacy of our mentor? (Refer to pp. 48–49)
6. The philosophy of the SGI is that all members are equal in status and no intermediaries, such as priests, are necessary to attain enlightenment. How are you living out the Soka Spirit, the spirit of standing up for justice to protect the dignity of life, within circumstances you are facing currently in your life? (Refer to p. 51)