

Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life
- *Shoji Ichidaiji Kechimyaku Sho* -

Lecture 1 of 3 from [Selected Lectures on the Gosho](#), vol. 1.

Mirror for Believers

The Shoji Ichidaiji Kechimyaku Sho (Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life) brings back fond memories of my master, Josei Toda, for he lectured on it many times. "Shoji Ichidaiji Kechimyaku Sho is one of the most difficult letters of all the Gosho," he used to say over and over again. "Whenever I read it, it seems so clear at first, but then I find myself wondering again what it means. The higher my state of life becomes, the more fully I understand this Gosho." Mr. Toda also said it contains the essence of faith for disciples of Nichiren Daishonin. In fact, he said, without the spirit of this Gosho we cannot accomplish kosen-rufu nor can we achieve the essence of faith and the ultimate in Buddhism. "Shoji Ichidaiji Kechimyaku Sho," he added, "is a spotless mirror of the practice of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth."

I am convinced that what he said is true, for it can be proven --- there is documentary, theoretical and actual proof. I myself have often lectured on this Gosho and have pondered deeply on it. Each time I am astonished and again impressed by all that is condensed into each sentence, each phrase. I can only call it a mystic work. Without my even being aware of it, this Gosho has come to bear a decisive influence on my life. Here I want to share with you the thoughts I have developed after many years of study and reflection on the Shoji Ichidaiji Kechimyaku Sho. I would like to think of this as a commemoration of the seventeenth anniversary of my inauguration as president, and also of this year, 1977, the Year of Study. I have only one goal: knowing that the movement toward kosen-rufu will continue far into the future, I want us to delve deeply into the basic point of faith of the Soka Gakkai through this Gosho. I want to confirm the fundamental spirit of our faith, the lifeblood of faith.

This is a very short Gosho, but the doctrine it contains is profound, for it probes directly into life and death, the ultimate question of Buddhist philosophy. It is that question to which Shakyamuni Buddha and all the others who lived for Buddhism devoted their wisdom and passion in the search for a solution. All of the so-called eighty-four thousand teachings and all the innumerable theses and commentaries on them, without exception, focus on one theme: life and death. Sairenbo was a scholar of the Tendai sect which was regarded as the highest school of Buddhist philosophy in those days. Eager to break through the mystery of life and death, he asked Nichiren Daishonin for illumination. The Daishonin's reply is the Shoji Ichidaiji Kechimyaku Sho. There he presents the conclusions he has reached, based on his enlightenment as the Buddha of the Latter Day, and at the same time he explains how all mankind can actually attain Buddhahood.

In Shoho Jisso Sho (The True Entity of Life), the Daishonin discusses general themes, such as universal phenomena and the true entity, the Ten Worlds and the Mystic Law, the common mortal and the Buddha. Then he reminds us of our mission to propagate the Mystic Law as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, people "of the same mind as Nichiren." In contrast, the Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life deals specifically with the ultimate purpose of Buddhist practice --- attaining Buddhahood --- and tells us clearly the type of practice which leads directly to that objective.

The True Entity of Life, it will be recalled, contains the main points of two of the Daishonin's major theses: The Opening of the Eyes, which explains the object of worship from the viewpoint of the Person, and The True Object of Worship, which discusses it from the viewpoint of the Law. The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life is no less important, for it contains the teaching based on Nichiren Daishonin's own enlightenment as the original Buddha. It is the place where the Daishonin reveals the state of his Buddhahood. Since this Gosho is so important to Buddhist teaching, it should be read and reread, until it becomes a part of your life.

This Gosho was written on February II, 1272, at Tsukahara on Sado Island. As in the case of The True Entity of Life, it was written to Sairenbo Nichijo, whose background I have described elsewhere.* Of course the original was a personal letter, and the title it now has was affixed

later. However, because it begins with a discussion of shoji ichidaiji kechimyaku, I will begin by examining this phrase.

*[Sairenbo Nichijo, who received the letter containing that passage, is said to have been a priest of the Tendai sect before he became a follower of Nichiren Daishonin. We can presume, therefore, that he knew about "the true entity of all phenomena" as the basic teaching of the Tendai school. He could not, however, thoroughly understand it through T'ien-t'ai's theory, and so he asked the Daishonin to explain the exact meaning of the passage.]

Shoji is life destined to repeat the endless cycle of birth and death. Ichidaiji may be rendered as "the most fundamental essence." Ichi, literally "one," here means not "one of many," but "the one and only." Ichidaiji, then, is "the one and only fundamental essence." Shoji ichidaiji, as a result, denotes the most important thing in our lives --- the ultimate law of life. Kechimyaku is the "pulse" of the flow of life, which continues on, unchanged, beneath the superficial passages of life and death. The master-disciple relationship is vital in Buddhism, for through this relationship the Buddha, as teacher, transmits the law of life --- which he has fully realized --- to the lives of his disciples. The transmission of the law is also called kechimyaku.

Shoji ichidaiji kechimyaku conveys, in effect, the way the Buddha endows people undergoing the endless cycle of birth and death with the ultimate law so they can manifest it in their lives. That is the crux of Buddhism, the quality that makes Buddhism a practical philosophy involving living relationships, carrying it far beyond the reach of mere ideas.

The Ultimate Law of Life

Having roughly explained shoji ichidaiji kechimyaku, I would like to elaborate now on the meaning of shoji and ichidaiji. I will speak about kechimyaku in detail later. Shoji has basically two meanings. One is its significance as an abbreviation of sho-ro-byo-shi (ji of shoji is a phonetic change of shi) --- birth, old age, sickness and death --- including all human suffering. The other meaning is derived from belief in eternal life and signifies the entity that repeats the endless cycle of birth and death. Shoji, as used in this Goshō, denotes the latter.

Life and death are the two phases that all living beings must pass through. Conversely, a living being can exist only in the state of life or death. The ordinary person can see his life only as it begins with birth and ends with death. The Buddhist perspective goes beyond this limited view, however, extending its horizon to life as a changeless entity that exists eternally, sometimes in the manifest phase called life, and at other times in the latent phase called death. What is the Buddhist view of the two phases of life and death? The Juryō chapter of the Lotus Sutra says, "There is no ebb and flow of birth and death, . . ." Since "ebb and flow" indicate death and birth, the Juryō chapter, based on belief in eternal life, denies the ebb and flow of life, that beings are born and die. In the Ongi Kuden (his oral teachings of the Lotus Sutra), however, Nichiren Daishonin says that the denial of birth and death originates in delusion. We should instead regard birth and death --- the ebb and flow --- as essential phases in the ultimate entity of life. This, he says, is the only valid view of life. Life is the state in which its ultimate entity is manifest, and death the state in which it lies dormant. The ultimate entity remains unchanged, repeating the endless cycle of birth and death.

Buddhism also teaches us that life and death are one and the same. What allows life to continue is the mystic energy accumulated in its latent state. When the latent form is aroused by some external influence, it becomes manifest once again, giving full expression to its individuality. Eventually, it quietly recedes into the state of death. However, during this latent state, that being stores up fresh energy in preparation for its coming rebirth.

Life is like the explosion and combustion of a force stored up during its rest period. When it has completed its lifetime, it passes away, merging into the universe. During this latent state it refuels itself with cosmic force, awaiting the time when it can spring to life once again. Thus birth and death are intrinsic to the ultimate entity of life. The source of its rhythm that accords perfectly with the rhythm of the universe is Nam-myōhō-enge-kyō. A deformed life, out of step with the intrinsic rhythm, must go through a cycle of birth and death burdened by a limiting destiny, and it is usually in the state of Hell, Hunger or Animality. This is what we call evil karma. One possessing such a karma is born, lives and dies constrained by bonds as heavy as any iron chains. There is only one way to transform such a misdirected cycle of birth

and death and bring it into step with the cosmic rhythm, and that is to return to, and start anew from, the Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

That is a macroscopic view of life, seen in terms of one lifetime within the eternity of past, present and future. We must also look at life microscopically, seeing the births and deaths that occur within each of us at every passing moment. A lifetime is made up of the repetition of this process, for births and deaths of smaller lives combine to ensure the continuation of a greater life.

First, consider birth and death in terms of space. Galaxies wax and wane in size as stars within them are born and perish. In the existence of each star are the births and deaths of myriad living beings, as well as the appearance and disappearance of mountains, rivers and valleys. What about our own lifetime? We do not maintain the same matter we were born with from beginning to end. Most of our body cells continually die, to be replaced by new ones. Their births and deaths --- metabolism --- keep the body constantly provided with fresh life force and enable it to live on.

Life and death coexist in our bodies. Fingernails and hair are "lifeless," insentient things, but they originate from living material. They move from a living to a dead state in a smooth, unruffled change, followed by new fingernails and hair. The births and deaths of these and other parts of the body all combine to form a greater life. Thus life is neither a single-unit entity nor a mere assembly of parts that work independently of each other. It is something that consists of multiple components functioning in perfect unity, smaller lives combining to form a greater life. Tiny streams of births and deaths flow into broader rivers of births and deaths, which in turn pour into the vast ocean of cosmic life. The mystic nature of life is truly incredible in its working.

Now let us look at life in terms of time. We experience life and death at every moment. If our life at the present moment is in Hell, the state of Hell is "alive," and the other nine worlds are "dead." Suppose you are finally cured of a long, drawn-out disease. You dance with joy in the state of Rapture. The agony of Hell you felt a moment ago is gone; it has died. Hell and the other worlds have passed away, replaced by the vigorous life of Rapture. You want to tell other people of the joy of your recovery and attribute it to your Buddhist practice so they can possibly benefit from your experience. Then Rapture vanishes and your life changes to the state of Bodhisattva. Each moment one of the Ten Worlds is alive and the others dead, and the next moment another state takes over. Our lifetime is an accumulation of momentary lives and deaths. Even if Rapture is alive now, the other nine worlds have not in the least ceased to exist; they have merely become dormant. Since they are latent, any one of them can come to life in the next moment.

Since our lifetime is an accumulation of moments, the most important thing is the state of life we assume at each moment. Eternity consists of moments, and each moment has a lifetime condensed in it. Hence our state of life from moment to moment determines the overall course of our life. This, more broadly, is the key to changing one's karma. When we value each moment and live actively, enthusiastically, ready to greet the next moment, we go through a state of life and death free from suffering and directed toward enlightenment. If not, we will have to go through lifetime after lifetime in the six paths (from Hell to Rapture), passing from one dark state to another. That is why we must embrace Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the Law which penetrates the ultimate in life and death. Only this Law will enable us to attain the state of life in which it is possible to live eternity in a single moment.

Next, consider ichidaiji. It signifies "ultimate." Shoji ichidaiji, therefore, means that the ultimate in Buddhism lies only in the question of life. What then is the ultimate law of life? Nichiren Daishonin gives a clear answer in the Ongi Kuden, in the section on the purpose of the Buddha's advent. Here let me enlarge on this question, relying on his explanation. Ichi of ichidaiji, as we have seen, indicates "the most fundamental essence." Ichi, literally "one," is not just a number like three, five or seven; it means "the absolute one and only," something that has no equivalent. All human affairs originate from, and return to, the one and only fundamental question --- life and death. This is what ichi signifies. No matter what grand system of thought a scholar may develop, should he overlook or evade the question of life and death, his achievement will be nothing but a castle built on sand.

Dai, literally "great," here is used to mean that the ultimate law of life is the fundamental force which penetrates and pervades not only humanity but all things in the universe. It denotes the universality of life. All phenomena from the tiniest particle of dust to the galaxies move in rhythm to the law of life. There is nothing in the entire universe which is not touched by it.

Ji literally means "fact." That the ultimate law of life is constantly present and working in man and in the universe is not a mere idea; real phenomena are themselves the law. We live from day to day, the seasons come and go --- all of this is part of the law of life and death, and ji expresses this incontrovertible fact.

Ichidaiji also symbolizes en'yu-santai or the perfect union of the three truths: kutai (potential), ketai (form) and chutai (entity or source). In the Ongi Kuden we read, "Ichi refers to chutai, dai to kutai, and ji to ketai. What is meant by the 'perfect union of the three truths'? It is that which is called Nam-myoho-enge-kyo." Ichi here is the ultimate entity that embraces everything; it therefore corresponds to chutai, or the Middle Road. Dai tells us that the ultimate law of life and the universe is as extensive and all-inclusive as space; it therefore corresponds to kutai. Ji implies that this law manifests itself in the kaleidoscopic changes of all actual phenomena; it therefore corresponds to ketai. In the final analysis, ichidaiji is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the Law which perfectly incorporates the three truths. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the ultimate law of life and the universe. At the same time it contains all things in the entire cosmos. It is not just an idea or something abstract and vague; it manifests itself in actual phenomena. The true entity of life completely free and unobstructed --- this is ichidaiji.

In the Ongi Kuden, Nichiren Daishonin also says: "Ichi represents the life-moment (ichinen), and dai indicates conditions of life (sanzen). What creates the conditions of life are the internal and external causes of reality (ji)." "Reality" is the fundamental power that makes each life-moment actually work within all phenomena in the universe. Ichidaiji therefore means the same thing as manifestation of ichinen sanzen. In the final analysis, Nichiren Daishonin is saying that ichidaiji is the Gohonzon, the power house of the Mystic Law.

The Eternal Heritage

I have just carefully read your letter.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this Goshō during his exile on Sado Island. In an environment filled with almost indescribable hardships, he carefully read every letter from his disciples and devoted himself heart and soul to giving them guidance. For him, even that desolate island was a field for his battle, a field of his Buddhist practice. His simple statement, "I have just carefully read your letter," makes me realize that nothing could destroy or obstruct the sublime state of life of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin.

To reply, the ultimate law of life and death as transmitted from the Buddha to all living beings is Myoho-enge-kyo.

He gives his conclusion first: shoji ichidaiji kechimyaku --- the ultimate law of life and death as transmitted from the Buddha to the people --- is Myoho-enge-kyo, which is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo itself. The doctrine of shoji ichidaiji kechimyaku was originally developed by the Tendai school. Sairenbo, formerly of that school, apparently asked in his letter what this doctrine was all about. The Daishonin's words, "I have just carefully read your letter," suggest that Sairenbo's letter described in detail what he, as a priest of the Tendai sect, had learned about that teaching and how in the end he had become confused as to its true meaning. In his reply to the lengthy and complicated inquiry, Nichiren Daishonin revealed the ultimate law in a single sentence, and dispelled the priest's delusion completely. The conclusion seems to be simple enough, but a profound philosophical process took place before it would be reached, as we will see by studying the sentences which follow.

The five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo were transferred from the two Buddhas inside the Treasure Tower, Shakyamuni and Taho, to Bodhisattva Jogyo, carrying on a heritage unbroken since the infinite past.

Why does the Daishonin regard Myoho-enge-kyo as the entity of shoji ichidaiji kechimyaku, the heritage of the ultimate law of life? His first reason is as follows. Myoho-enge-kyo was expounded during the ceremony of the Lotus Sutra as the law to be propagated in the Latter Day. Bodhisattva Jogyo was entrusted with that task because, the Daishonin states, the true

entity of his life, which has continued on since the infinite past, is Myoho-rence-kyo. It follows, therefore, that the above sentence is written from a double viewpoint. The statement, "The five characters . . . to Bodhisattva Jogyo," is made from the standpoint of Shakyamuni Buddha's Lotus Sutra, while the phrase, "carrying on a heritage unbroken since the infinite past," is stated from Nichiren Daishonin's position.

According to Shakyamuni's teaching, Bodhisattva Jogyo inherited Myoho-rence-kyo from Shakyamuni and Taho during the ceremony of the Lotus Sutra in the air. From the standpoint of the Daishonin's Buddhism, however, his true identity is jiyuyushin nyorai of kuon ganjo --- the original Buddha who simultaneously embodies the Person and the Law, and who has dwelt in the world of the Mystic Law since the infinite past. Therefore he "carries on a heritage unbroken since the infinite past." The powerful life in the original Buddha since the infinite past is Nam-myoho-rence-kyo itself.

Life Itself Is the Mystic Law

Myo represents death, and ho represents life. Life and death are the two phases passed through by the entities of the Ten Worlds, the entities of all sentient beings which embody the law of cause and effect (rence).

Nichiren Daishonin next reveals that the ultimate entity of life in all sentient beings --- in all people --- is also shoji ichidaiji kechimiyaku, or Myoho-rence-kyo. "Myo represents death, and ho represents life" is another way to say that the law of life and death is in itself myoho, the Mystic Law. The two phases of life and death, which are manifested in the ultimate entity of life, are together the Mystic Law. The law does not exist outside the realities of living and dying; our life itself is the Mystic Law. Then again, our lives in their repetition of the cycle of birth and death are also the entities of the Ten Worlds. Earlier I explained how birth and death occur in a moment of life by referring to the Ten Worlds. They do not mean types of environments or surrounding situations; the Ten Worlds are to be found in the life of everyone --- in its rise and fall, ebb and flow.

Some people are harassed by bill collectors. Some students go through agony as they cram for examinations. There are many more examples of life in the state of Hell, but basically the tortures of Hell always come back to the question of life and death. The intense desire to live on and the desperate attempt to escape death give rise to the anguish and agonies of Hell, which are, then, nothing but the results of such desires. The state of Hunger revolves around greed, and so that, too, is related to life and death. In this way everyday life, in its depths, always involves life and death. Patients groan with and fear the pain of illness because they do not want to die. Some seek fame and status; others set their minds on learning. All derive from their attitudes toward life.

As long as we take the occurrences of every day lightly, we will not understand life's true meaning. Joy, anger, sorrow and pleasure may seem trivial, but they are ultimately related to the question of life and death. Because we are human, we may consciously or unconsciously evade relating our feelings and activities to life and death, but in the depths of the changing phenomena of the Ten Worlds, this problem of life and death is the most serious question of all. Only when we squarely confront it, recognize it, and reflect our recognition in the way we live, can we improve the state of our life. The human revolution is the process of transition from the six paths to the four noble worlds, from the two vehicles (Learning and Realization) to Bodhisattva to Buddhahood. It is a revolution that can only take place when we seek the ultimate law and root our attitude toward life and death firmly within it.

Let us next consider why the Daishonin says, "Myo represents death, and ho represents life." It is impossible to imagine anything about the state of death. Where does it exist, and how? Even if told that it continues to exist as part of universal life, we remain unconvinced. Death, therefore, is myo, a mystic phenomenon. In contrast to death, manifest life appears in many ways, shapes and forms. Like a law, it manifests one or another of the Ten Worlds in accordance with the workings of the Ten Factors of Life. [The True Entity of Life, section "Buddha is Not and Abstract Being] When you do not eat for a long time, you crave food --- the state of Hunger. When ridiculed, you are upset or angry --- the world of Anger. This is the natural law of life. Life, therefore, is ho, or law.

The Chinese character for ho consists of the ideographs for "water" and "passing away" combined. Together they mean "flow of water." Water represents the even, eternal and impartial, that which pervades the universe. "Passing away" symbolizes the flow of time from the infinite past to the infinite future. In some ancient literature we read that the radical "passing away" also indicates "an existence that banishes evils." All streams, be they rapids rushing down mountainsides or large rivers meandering through plains, flow on and on, never stopping, until they finally empty their waters into the ocean. The Buddhist sees the rise and fall of all phenomena, sometimes manifest and at other times latent, in terms of causality. He observes law within the movements of everything, not in a still, abstract form. It is probably for this reason that Buddhism regards the flow of water as symbolic of law. Buddhist law exists in the realities of everyday life, in the actual feelings of being alive. Hence shoho (literally, all laws) of shoho jisso is translated as "all phenomena."

The usual concept of a law or laws is much closer to death than it is to life. The law of gravitation, the theory of relativity and the principles of political economy are but rules of relationships among real phenomena; laws, theories or principles themselves do not appear in any concrete form. In contrast, one of the special qualities of Buddhism is that it makes it possible to see the law within each phenomenon that occurs. It is not an abstract concept one step removed from the realities of life, but the living relationships that real people experience and express from moment to moment. Thus it becomes clear why Nichiren Daishonin states, "Ho represents life."

If Buddhism were limited only to the observation of phenomena, it would be no different from scientific research. The study of the flow of a river belongs to the realm of science. To understand the fundamental force that creates the flow--this is the true object of religion. That fundamental force is never divorced from real phenomena, but neither can it be grasped as a form or a shape. Hence it is described as myo, mystic.

Earlier I explained the sentence, "Myo represents death, and ho represents life," in terms of the life and death of people, but it also applies to all other phenomena as well. Suppose we see an angry man. He may be furious over an argument he had, or he may be angry with himself for something he did. No matter what the cause, his countenance and attitude are ho, and since they are visible, they represent "life." On the other hand, his psychological state --- the causes and circumstances which have brought about his anger --- is impossible to see or fathom. This is exactly what the phrase, "Myo represents death," is talking about.

The movement of the universe is ho and therefore "life." The fundamental force that causes this movement is myo and therefore "death." But what is this fundamental force? The three meanings of myo given in On the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra should be helpful. They are: "to open," "to be endowed and perfect" and "to revive." Concerning the first, Miao-lo stated that "to reveal is to open." "To open" indicates the quality or force which activates a life, like opening a secret repository, and causes it to pervade the entire universe. "To be endowed and perfect" means, for instance, that each drop in the ocean contains the same elements and properties as the ocean itself. "To revive" is, in other words, to create value. Insentient or inorganic matter such as wood and stone is transformed into a building, a place of bustling activity --- that is revival. So, too, is the human act of reforming oneself so that a person can change his or her karma and be able to contribute to society.

The fundamental force is invisible. Suppose a star is born. Physicists see it as the result of a recombination of matter. But something definitely activated that process, some force on which universal life depends for its growth. This is the meaning of "to open." All things in the universe contain each other --- they do not exist separately --- and together they form the greater life of the macrocosm. This is what "to be endowed and perfect" means. The meeting and parting of various forms of life creates new values and new lives. This is "to revive."

All these workings can be traced back to the fundamental force of the universe. Without this force the universe would only be a lifeless chunk of matter. I suspect that the late Dr. Toynebee had such a force in mind when he said that he believed in the existence of "the ultimate spiritual reality behind the universe." Since the fundamental force is beyond the imagination, it is myo (mystic), and since we cannot see it, it is "death." But the force does exist, unseen but definitely underlying all phenomena (ho).

The entities of the Ten Worlds which pass through the phases of life and death can be called rengo, because they embody the law of cause and effect. The Mystic Law or myoho means life and death, and rengo means the entities that manifest this law. Therefore, all forms of life in the Ten Worlds are in themselves myoho-rengo.

T'ien-t'ai said, "You must realize that the interrelated actions and reactions of sentient beings and their environments all manifest the law of the simultaneity of cause and effect." "Sentient beings and their environments" here means the reality of life and death. The law of simultaneity of cause and effect is clearly at work in everything that lives and dies.

Here Nichiren Daishonin backs up his previous statement by quoting from T'ien-t'ai's Hokke Gengi (Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra). "The interrelated actions and reactions of sentient beings and their environments" refers to the law of causality manifested in life. It signifies life as it actually exists --- in other words, people in the Ten Worlds. In terms of time, we see that all life is invariably destined to be born and to die --- the reality of life and death. In terms of space, we discover the relationships between sentient beings and their environments. Nichiren Daishonin shows how the spatial relationship that T'ien-t'ai grasped as the law of cause and effect between sentient beings and their environments is in perfect agreement with the law of life and death. From this derived his statement that " 'sentient beings and their environments' here means the reality of life and death."

Life as it actually exists --- the interrelation of sentient beings and their environments within the reality of life and death --- manifests the law of cause and effect. In this law of life, the cause and its effect always take place simultaneously; it is therefore called "the Law of the Lotus." Let me say a few words about the Law of the Lotus and simultaneous cause and effect. As we know, the lotus plant puts forth flower and seed at the same time, which is why it is such an eminent symbol of the principle of simultaneous cause and effect. However, it is important to understand what this principle means in relation to our actual lives.

In the physical and chemical sciences as well as in the affairs of society, the cause and effect are invariably observed at different times. Simultaneous cause and effect is only found in vital phenomena --- more specifically, in the law of life which Buddhism was the first to elucidate. The True Object of Worship contains a passage which explains the Ten Worlds. It reads, "Rage is the world of Hell, greed is that of Hunger, foolishness is that of Animality, perversity is that of Anger, joy is that of Rapture, and calmness is that of Humanity." Rage, part of the workings of life, is the cause, and Hell is its effect. You don't become angry now and reach the state of Hell some time later. You are angry (cause) and experience the state of Hell (effect) at the same time. This is simultaneous cause and effect. Rage is one way the sentient being expresses himself. In this case his environment will reflect the state of Hell. The sentient being is the cause and his environment the result. Hence T'ien-t'ai's expression, "the interrelated actions and reactions of sentient beings and their environments." Likewise, precisely when we believe in the Mystic Law (cause), we are in the state of Buddhahood (effect), which means that the law of simultaneous cause and effect is the principle which enables us to attain enlightenment.

Life's Mysterious Workings

The Great Teacher Dengyo said, "Birth and death are the mysterious workings of the life essence. The ultimate reality of life lies in existence and nonexistence." No phenomena --- heaven or earth, Yin or Yang, the sun or the moon, the five planets, or any life-condition from Hell to Buddhahood --- are free from birth and death. Thus the life and death of all phenomena are simply the two phases of Myoho-rengo-kyo. In his Maka Shikan, T'ien-t'ai says, "The emergence of all things is the manifestation of their intrinsic nature, and their extinction, the withdrawal of that nature into the state of latency." Shakyamuni and T'ho Buddhas, too, are the two phases of life and death.

"The life essence" in Dengyo's statement is Myoho-rengo-kyo, and "the ultimate reality of life" describes the state of life of the Buddha who has realized this Mystic Law. "Birth and death" signifies life's workings, the transition from death to life and from life to death. In contrast, "existence and nonexistence" concerns whether or not that life appears in this world. We might say that life comes into existence with birth and recedes into nonexistence with death. Nonetheless, nonexistence here does not mean absolute nothingness, but the potential state which in Buddhism is called ku. In any event, both "birth and death" and "existence and

nonexistence" are the workings of Myoho-enge-kyo, the two phases of Myoho-enge-kyo. Conversely, while all things are born and die, come into existence and recede into nonexistence, their entities are the eternally unchanging law of Myoho-enge-kyo.

With this basic understanding of the above passage, I will now discuss Dengyo's statement from the standpoint of faith and daily life. "The life essence" refers to our state of mind toward faith, our determination to chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo in perfect harmony with the Gohonzon. To be resolved to believe in and chant to the Gohonzon is to be endowed with the power to fully utilize the law of life and death. Our lives are adrift in the sea of suffering of life and death, but when we base both our life and death on the Mystic Law, we will be able to cross that sea without fear. The same is true with the phenomenal world of existence and nonexistence. By fixing our minds on the Mystic Law, we are able to move throughout that world in any way we please. In the final analysis, neither happiness nor good fortune comes to us of itself; we are the ones who must build it.

We can make the law of life and death work for us by harnessing the mystic functions of the life essence. This is still not the same as saying that birth and death will cease, or that we will become immortal, a legendary sage. We will live on as ordinary people, but we will no longer have to repeat a continually more painful cycle of suffering as we go through birth and death. Making the law of life and death work for us means that we can instead find joy, by discovering the essential reality of life and death themselves. Then we can live freely and as happily as a butterfly floating from flower to flower.

The Ongi Kuden states, "We repeat the cycle of birth and death secure upon the earth of our intrinsic enlightened nature." Our life from past to present to future is like going for a drive. From birth to death, in lifetime after lifetime, we travel upon the great earth of life. But even though birth and death are repeated by everyone, there is a great difference between struggling across a dangerous swamp in an old rattletrap and speeding along a freeway in one of the latest models. The former is the result of living your life with the idea that everything ends with death, and the latter the result of a life lived with a knowledge of the essential reality of birth and death. By harnessing the mysterious functions of the life essence, we are able to enjoy the enlightened cycle, but we can only do so by continual practice of gongyo.

Ponder the practical implications for a moment. Which law will we manifest in life and death, and which path will we travel through existence and nonexistence? The deciding factor will be the attitude and feelings we have toward the Mystic Law innate within us, the strength of our faith in the Gohonzon. The phenomenal world has its own, natural law of causality. We live our life in the world of phenomena --- the phenomena of birth and death, and existence and nonexistence. Can we transform our entire being into an entity filled with good fortune, or will we have to plunge into an abyss of misery? Steering and directing us is our state of mind which, though invisible, is always at work

Nichiren Daishonin states, "It is because one's entire being is contained in each life-moment that the Buddha preaches of the great benefits in experiencing even a moment of joy when hearing the teachings of Buddhism." The happiness to have encountered the Mystic Law and the joyful, courageous faith and practice as a Soka Gakkai member carrying out an unprecedented Buddhist movement --- from these feelings immeasurable benefits come forth, and they lead to a life of true success and victory as a human being. The difference between an active and a passive attitude may at first seem negligible, but in the long run it grows into a tremendous difference, which no one can help but see.

"No phenomena --- heaven or earth, Yin or Yang, the sun or the moon, the five planets, or any life --- condition from Hell to Buddhahood --- are free from birth and death." Nothing in the ceaselessly changing universe can avoid the law of life and death. The earth on which we live and the limitless expanse of space --- they too repeat the cycles of birth and death. The sun and the moon were formed in the distant past; eventually they, too, will become extinct. The "five planets" indicate five of the earth's fellow planets which, like it, revolve around the sun. Going outward from the sun, they are: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Thanks to the telescope, today we know that there are three more planets in the solar system --- Uranus, Neptune and Pluto --- which were still unknown in the Daishonin's day.

In any event, the entities of all things and all phenomena are Myoho-enge-kyo. Therefore, their inevitable birth and death are, in the final analysis, that of Myoho-enge-kyo. That is

precisely what T'ien-t'ai means when he says, "The emergence of all things is the manifestation of their intrinsic nature, and their extinction, the withdrawal of that nature into the state of latency." The "intrinsic nature" is the Mystic Law, and the manifestation and extinction of all phenomena in the universe is, therefore, that of Myoho-enge-kyo.

"Shakyamuni and Taho Buddhas, too, are the two phases of life and death." Shakyamuni represents life and Taho death. The two Buddhas, seated side by side in the Treasure Tower during the Lotus Sutra's ceremony in the air, symbolize the two phases of life and death. We can also say that Shakyamuni represents subjective wisdom and Taho, objective truth. Subjective wisdom refers to one who acts, which in turn implies life. Objective truth is that which is proven to exist through wisdom, and implies death. Thus, Shakyamuni symbolizes life, and Taho, death.

Beyond Discrimination

Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment countless aeons ago, the Lotus Sutra which leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from each other. Therefore, to chant Myoho-enge-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate law of life and death. To carry on this heritage is the most important task for Nichiren's disciples, and that is precisely what it means to embrace the Lotus Sutra.

So far, Nichiren Daishonin has revealed the ultimate law of life and death, the ultimate law to which the Buddha was enlightened, and which constitutes our own entities. From this passage onward, he teaches us how, practically, we can manifest the law, limitlessly, within ourselves. The above passage is especially important in that it speaks about the basic posture we should assume toward faith.

The entity of life of "Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment countless aeons ago" is Myoho-enge-kyo." The Lotus Sutra which leads all people to Buddhahood" --- this is the law through which Shakyamuni, as the Buddha who attained enlightenment countless aeons ago, expounded the teaching of his own enlightenment. By believing in and embracing this law, all people in the Ten Worlds can perceive the existence of the Mystic Law inherent within themselves and attain Buddhahood. The entity of the Lotus Sutra as well is Myoho-enge-kyo.

The phrase, "we ordinary human beings," corresponds to that part of the previous passage which reads, "No phenomena . . . are free from birth and death." We are only ordinary people, but we possess the seed of Buddhahood. Here the Daishonin makes it unmistakably clear that we, too, are entities of Myoho-enge-kyo. Taken literally, "Shakyamuni" here is the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the distant past called gohyaku-jintengo, as revealed in the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra; "the Lotus Sutra" denotes the sutra's entire twenty-eight chapters. On a deeper level, however, "Shakyamuni" is intended to mean the original Buddha from the infinite past who appeared in this world as Nichiren Daishonin, and "the Lotus Sutra" signifies the Dai-Gohonzon of true Buddhism. So the above passage tells us we should realize that Nichiren Daishonin, the Dai-Gohonzon and all common people like ourselves are alike entities of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, and are in no way different or separate from each other.

True Buddhism does not differentiate or separate these three from each other. It is a serious misconception to take the Buddha as a unique, superior existence, and to assume that the ordinary people of this world are, in contrast, lowly and ugly, utterly incapable of attaining Buddhahood. It would also run against the spirit of the above passage to decide that both the ceremony and the teaching of the Lotus Sutra are just the products of someone's imagination, divorced from the people and their daily life in this or any age. That kind of misconception is all the more insupportable when it comes to belief in true Buddhism. To think that there is an unbridgeable gap between Nichiren Daishonin and us, or that the Gohonzon exists somewhere outside of ourselves, would break the heritage of the ultimate law of life and death. Of course it is difficult for us to "realize" subjectively the oneness of the Daishonin, the Gohonzon and ourselves. We should consider "realize" to mean "have profound faith in," for Buddhism teaches that "one enters Buddhahood through faith," and also that one should "rely on faith instead of one's limited understanding."

In any event, the life of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. And the Gohonzon is of course Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, as the Daishonin himself states: "I,

Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sum)." Unworthy as we are, the life of each one of us is also Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. When we maintain firm faith in this as we chant daimoku, the heritage of the ultimate law of life and death, the great life of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, will well forth endlessly in our lives. This is "the most important task for Nichiren's disciples," those who practice his Buddhism. As the Daishonin says, this is "precisely what it means to embrace the Lotus Sutra."

"Now Is the Last Moment"

For one who summons up his faith and chants Nam-myoho-rence kyo with the profound insight that now is the last moment of his life, the sutra proclaims: "After his death, a thousand Buddhas will extend their hands to free him from all fear and keep him from falling into the evil paths."

"The profound insight that now is the last moment of one's life" does not just mean to make up one's mind to accept the end. It means to fill one's life and being to its depths with the knowledge of inevitable death as part of life itself. Nearly everyone assumes there are many more years to live. No one knows exactly when he will die, but the fact is that death may come at any moment. That is the reality of life. Another way to look at the words, "now is the last moment of one's life," is to consider that even if we live twenty, thirty or fifty more years, they are but a moment in comparison with eternity. Such knowledge surely ought to make any thoughtful person keenly aware of the great significance of being able to live and embrace true Buddhism. Glory, fame and fortune in this life are nothing. We must devote ourselves wholeheartedly to the practice of our faith, always focusing on the true purpose of our lives. We must do so in order to accumulate the kind of good fortune which will not vanish after death, but will remain for all eternity.

This is the most important aspect of our attitude toward faith. It does not follow, however, that we, as Buddhists who are also ordinary members of society, must discard everything but Buddhism. As we continue to practice our faith, upholding the goal of kosen-rufu, everything we do and everything we possess will be given new meaning because it is based on the Mystic Law. That is how we can live "with the profound insight that now is the last moment of life." When we live from moment to moment, always maintaining that resolution, "a thousand Buddhas will extend their hands to free us from all fear and keep us from falling into the evil paths." This means that we will live in a state of perfect peace and security, as if carried in the arms of a thousand Buddhas, and that we will never fall into the evil paths of Hell, Hunger, Animality and Anger. In a literal sense, the phrase means that we will enter a state of perfect peace and security at the last moment of our life, but in a deeper sense, it refers to each moment in this lifetime.

In the final analysis, to have "the profound insight that now is the last moment of our life" is to put our entire being into the present moment. It means to live with all our vigor from day to day, fighting to the last ounce of our energy to achieve kosen-rufu and attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. When you engage in religious talks with someone, you must decide that this is the last opportunity to talk to him about Buddhism and that if you miss this chance, he will never be able to change his karma. If you act on that resolution, you are already living with the spirit of knowing that now may be "the last moment" possible for this. It is important to do everything with utmost sincerity, whether you are chanting to the Gohonzon, studying the Goshō, or writing a letter of encouragement.

In this connection, I would like to think about life and death in terms of the last moment and what happens after death. Many scholars have studied this subject, among them, Mrs. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. She was formerly professor on the psychiatric faculty of the University of Chicago. Although a Protestant, she did not really believe in life after death. But after eleven years of working with some one thousand dying patients, she confides that she was forced to change her mind and came to realize that life goes on continuously, even after death. In her study of death, she interviewed patients who had been declared dead but later revived, and asked them if they were able to share any of their impressions or experiences. She reports the results of those interviews as follows, giving us an idea of a sort of out-of-the-body experience.

With many of these patients we found out that their experience is that, at the moment of physical death, they float out of their physical body and they float a few feet above the

hospital bed or the accident scene. They can see themselves lying in the bed and they can distinguish many things. They can describe in minute, very fine detail who came into the room, which family member, which priest was in the room. They describe the color of their dress, at the time they have no vital signs.

At the first instant of death," Mrs. Ross's report continues, "the moment of physical separation is a good experience. Like getting out of a prison." But the question is what happens the next moment. "What Christians call 'hell,' heaven or hell, the difference between good people and bad people, people who have led very enlightened lives and those who have not, comes afterwards, after separation. What Christians call 'hell' is not as Christians describe it. (Some of these patients were Christians.)

"After they leave, they go through the walls --- they don't need an open door or window --- and then they go toward a light, through a tunnel, over a bridge or river. After they have passed over, then comes what a Christian would call 'hell.' There is no god who condemns you, but you are forced to review your own life.

"It's like watching a television screen and your whole life is passed in front of you, not only deeds but also thoughts. This is going through hell, because you see everything you have ever done and thought." We may safely say, then, that some of the dead go through heaven and some others through hell. "So it is not a god who condemns you, but you condemn yourself."

Based on many years' experience with dying patients, Mrs. Ross emphatically agrees with the Buddhist concept of karma, that all of our acts are ingrained in our lives and will never disappear. She says, "It's a beautiful thing. I really believe that what you plant as seeds is what you will reap.... It's an absolute law. I know that." She believes in karmic debts only because she has verified that it is true. "It's not really a question of just believing," she says. "All these things can be scientifically verified."

Mrs. Ross is very pleased to know that her thought accords with Buddhism. "People will live a very different quality of life," she says, "if they knew this [concept of karma], if they could understand that they alone are responsible for all the good things and bad things that happen to them."

Ernest Hemingway also experienced such out-of-the-body travel. After he had been badly wounded, he wrote to a friend in his unique style: "I died then. I felt my soul or something coming right out of my body, like you'd pull a silk handkerchief out of a pocket by one corner. It flew around and then came back and went in again and I wasn't dead any more." He used this episode in *A Farewell to Arms*.

There is a collection of essays on death compiled by Dr. Michio Matsuda, a critic. It contains the essay "Shi no Gen'ei" (Death's Illusion) by Masaru Kobayashi. It is quite a lengthy account of his own experience, so I will give you a summary of it. Kobayashi underwent a critical surgical operation, and his account begins when he was lying on the operating table and the anesthesia began to wear off.

At midnight on the tenth, consciousness returned and with it the pain. It was like raging waves. When they engulfed me, everything before my eyes and inside my head became pure crimson, the color of blood.... When the pain became absolutely unbearable, I felt myself coming apart and beginning to fly away. I clearly saw myself, broken to bits, a black burnt-out chunk of matter, flying at tremendous speed through the vast reaches of space.

I left the warm earth, and felt the cooling atmosphere rush by me. Everything, myself included, was cold. As I went deeper into the universe, the space around me gradually changed from light to deep blue and on to a deeper and deeper black. I felt that death lay at the pitch-black extremity of the universe.

As I felt myself getting colder, I had no emotions at all. I had lost all sense of joy or sorrow for my family, even for myself. There was nothing of loneliness, pain or grief, even though I had parted with many relatives and friends. This was something I had never imagined.

But I did sense one thing that seemed inextinguishable --- an indescribable feeling of frustration. It was not mere frustration at having to part with my life. I had once been a human being and had lived a life which I could never live again. My sense of loss was at

having to go away without leaving the slightest mark on history --- history which would continue after my death.

This came as quite a shock to me. I thought I had lived as full a life as I could. I had never imagined that such a feeling would come at the last moment....

Perhaps there is no despair more concentrated than that at the last moment when you realize for the first time that your life has been meaningless, and you plunge toward death with indescribable remorse in your heart.

The one feeling which remained when joy, anger, sorrow, pleasure and all other emotions had gone was the feeling of frustration. It must have been what he felt at the core of his being. The meaninglessness he felt at not having contributed a thing to mankind threw him into a trough of despair on the borderline between life and death, a point of no return. Mr. Kobayashi's account is very precious for its description of a feeling which came from the very source of his being.

Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life
- *Shoji Ichidaiji Kechimyaku Sho* -

Lecture 2 of 3 from Selected Lectures on the Goshō, vol. 1.

Eternity in the Moment

Henri Bergson, the eminent philosopher, also believed in an afterlife. After years of contemplation on the human body and mind, Bergson came to agree that life continues after death. Dr. Arnold Toynbee once said that he believed death to be a return to "the ultimate spiritual reality" underlying the universe, the sea of immortality. As a scholar, he sought his answer to the question of life and death in higher religions, especially in the Buddhist concept of ku. He said:

I conclude that the phenomenon of death, followed by the disorganization of the physical aspect of a personality that we encounter as a psychosomatic unity, is, in terms of reality-in-itself, an illusion arising from the limitations of the human mind's conceptual capacity.... I believe that reality itself is timeless and spaceless but that it does not exist in isolation from our time-and-space-bound world....

Does life persist after death? And where does the soul go when the body goes back into the inorganic section of physical matter? To sum up, I believe that these questions can be answered in terms of ku or of eternity, but not in terms of space-time. [Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, *Choose Life* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 259-60.]

Jun Takami, a professional writer who died of cancer, wrote a poem "Kako no Kukan" (Space of the Past) in his work, *Shi no Fuchi yori* (From the Abyss of Death). In this poem he described how he felt as he lived facing imminent death.

As sand scooped in hands
Falls through the emaciated fingers,
So does time with a gritty sound run out of me,
My time --- so short and precious.

.....

I can only hear the ceaseless sound of time slipping away.

This poem suggests how much the author valued the short time left to him and how he wished he could live for eternity. To value each second more highly than a drop of blood --- this is the true way of life for people born in this world. Most people, however, waste all too much of their time before they are confronted with death. I once heard the story of a gifted free-lance reporter who succumbed to cancer. After being told he had cancer and would soon die, he began to use a daily pad calendar. To him, each day that remained was precious. He could not bear the sight of a calendar which showed all the days of the month or even of the whole year on one sheet of paper, as if every day was just another day. When each day came to a close, he would tear off one sheet from the calendar and tell himself, "Congratulations ! You have lived one more day," relishing the feeling of being still alive.

We do not need Martin Heidegger, or anyone, to tell us that human existence is itself a being-into-death" in order to know that death underlies life. Indeed, at each moment we meet death and at each moment are revived. It is the consciousness of death which really gives our life a sense of fulfillment. Without the consciousness of death one can neither live humanely nor spend time meaningfully. The question of death is in itself the question of life. As long as the question of death remains unsolved, life cannot be truly substantial.

Four years ago in spring, I went to London at the invitation of Dr. Toynbee for my second meeting with the British historian. After spending five days talking with him, I went to Paris, and from there rode a train for two hours to the Loire. Clear streams washing grassy banks, flocks of sheep, steeples of ancient castles, paths where birds chirped, quiet woods, flowers in full bloom, ageless farmhouses built of stone --- in such surroundings stood the ivy-covered house where Leonardo da Vinci spent his later years. In the bedroom where he ended his life there was a copper plate on which were engraved his words:

A substantial life is long.
Meaningful days give one a good sleep.
A fulfilled life gives one a quiet death.

C. G. Jung said, "From the middle of life onward, only he remains vitally alive who is ready to die with life." [C. G. Jung, *The Meaning of Death* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959), p. 6.] Jung's remark probably originated from his belief that the latter half of one's life is especially important. In a way, however, to be ready to "die with life" may be necessary throughout one's lifetime. Perhaps we can say that only those with such a determination will prove to have lived a truly vital life.

In his study, "The Relation between Life and Death, Living and Dying," Dr. Toynbee wrote: " 'In the midst of life we are in death.' From the moment of birth there is the constant possibility that a human being may die at any moment; and inevitably this possibility is going to become an accomplished fact sooner or later. Ideally, every human being ought to live each passing moment of his life as if the next moment were going to be his last." Although conceding that perhaps it may be too difficult for any human being to live permanently on this ideal level, he went on to say, "What can be said with assurance is that, the closer a human being can come to attaining this ideal state of heart and mind, the better and happier he or she will be." [Man's Concern with Death ed. Arnold Toynbee (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1968), p. 259.]

It is also instructive to learn how a natural scientist regards life and death. Dr. Kinjiro Okabe, physicist and professor emeritus of Osaka University, wrote a book entitled *Ningen wa Shindara Donaruka* (What Happens to Man after Death?). In this book he takes a unique approach, starting with the concepts of modern science, and calling his speculation "scientific inference" about the problem of death. Dr. Okabe's view may be summarized as follows:

In the world of physics, there is a law called the energy ' Never does energy or matter come conservation principle. Never does energy or matter come from nothing. Nor is energy or matter actually lost.

Man's soul is supra-matter and supra-energy; it cannot be felt by the five senses. I, too, must concede the existence of the soul. Matter which composes the human body is completely replaced, through metabolism, by new matter in several years. Materially, one becomes a totally different person from what he was in his childhood, though he may retain some of the physical characteristics he used to have as a child. Therefore, if there is to be identity between what we are today and what we were as children, then we are forced to admit that there must be something which may be called the human soul.

If the soul really exists, the energy conservation principle must also be applicable. In other words, it seems very possible that a human life does not become extinct upon death but continues to exist in some state or other.

I postulate the existence of a "core of the soul." Life is a state during which the core of the soul is inseparably merged with the body and manifests itself in the workings of life. In other words, it is in an active state. Death is a state in which the core of the soul is inactive. It cannot manifest itself in life-functions as it did during the active state. But it still contains the

ability to sustain manifest life. When the dormant state passes into the active state, the core of the soul again begins to perform its functions.

Thus, man's life or death depends on whether the core of the soul is in the active or the inactive state. The core itself continues to exist throughout life and death.

I suspect that Dr. Okabe's "soul" or "core of the soul" is different from the meaning usually given the word. The Nirvana Sutra speaks for Buddhism when it categorically denies the concept of the soul as applied in the ordinary sense. I think that what Dr. Okabe calls the core of the soul has something in common with what is called "the self" of life in Buddhism—that which sustains our identity.

Life is the accumulation of all the moments we live. One who cannot live meaningfully today cannot hope to lead a brilliant life tomorrow. No matter what grand plans one makes, if he does not value each moment, they will be just so many castles in the air. All the causes in the past and all the effects in the future are condensed within the present moment of life. Whether or not we improve our state of life at this moment will determine whether we can expiate the evils we have caused since the infinite past and be able to build up good fortune to remain for all eternity. The key is whether or not we have faith strong enough to decide that this may be the last moment of our life. The above passage, therefore, gives us the principle for changing our karma.

"After his death, a thousand Buddhas will extend their hands to free him from all fear and keep him from falling into the evil paths." This is a sentence in the Kambotsu-hon, the twenty-eighth chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Why do we need the assistance of those Buddhas? Because a life, once inactivated and merged with the universe, can no longer do anything of its own will. It has to suffer the effects of its lifetime, or the state it was in at the time of death, and those effects are strict and absolute. At that time a thousand Buddhas extend their protecting hands. What could be more reassuring!

The passage does not simply mean that Buddhas, literally, "extend their hands." It also means that we will be able to stand on an eternal footing, that we will attain happiness that can never wane with time. Of course, all this becomes possible only when you keep your faith strong enough to determine that now is the last moment of your life. As the Goshō tells us, "The firmer one's faith, the stronger the gods' protection." It is a serious mistake to expect that those Buddhas will come to protect you if you don't strive for your human revolution. Literally, the passage means that the Buddhas "extend their hands" because an inactivated life is in a latent state of existence. Its true meaning is that we have to strive through our own human revolution to bring forth the protection of a thousand Buddhas who reside within our hearts.

The Buddha's Protection

How can we possibly hold back our tears at the inexpressible joy of knowing that not just one or two, nor only one or two hundred, but as many as a thousand Buddhas will come to greet us with open arms?

This is a denunciation of Nembutsu. The Nembutsu sect preaches that if one dies invoking the name of Amida (Skt., Amitabha or Amitayus) Buddha, he will be able to go to the land where this Buddha is said to dwell. Two bodhisattvas, Kannon (Avalokiteshvara) and Seishi (Mahasthamaprapta), come as messengers riding on a cloud to take him to that land. Most people in Nichiren Daishonin's day believed in Amida. The passage quoted above reveals his indignation at the Nembutsu sect for deluding the people with such a doctrine. Not just one or two Buddhas, much less two bodhisattvas, but as many as a thousand Buddhas will extend their arms to protect us, giving us so much more solace than what Nembutsu preaches. Even if one is destined to fall into the three evil paths, he will escape that fate. The Ongi Kuden says, "One thousand Buddhas signify the teaching of One Thousand Factors of Life." [At each moment, life experiences one of ten conditions or the Ten Worlds. Each of these worlds possesses the potential for all the ten within itself, thus making one hundred possible worlds. Each of these hundred worlds possesses the Ten Factors, thus becoming one thousand factors. In short one thousand factors are the forces and phenomena manifest by one's life essence.] In other words, all the protective functions of the universe will work to guard the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

If there were only one or two Buddhas to save us, all beings in this world would be necessarily subordinate to them --- something akin to absolute monotheism. Such a dogma in effect says that the people are powerless beings who can seek salvation only by beseeching those Buddhas. The Buddhas, on their part, would have to be magnificent looking so that people would seek them out with awe and respect. That kind of teaching centering on the "person" lacks universality. It becomes something like a "cult of personality" and only acts to separate Buddhas from the people.

The Lotus Sutra is very different. It assures that a thousand Buddhas will protect us, which ultimately indicates the Hundred Worlds and Thousand Factors of Life. As a teaching, it centers on the "law." If we abide by that law, the functions of the universe work to protect our lives. Furthermore, what sets those functions in motion is the individual's life force. Thus the Lotus Sutra teaches true independence, and it is a universal teaching. Buddhas need not be august or magnificent in appearance, and we, common people, are able to make all the Buddhas and heavenly gods throughout the universe work for us and protect us, just as we are.

How does this principle apply to our daily life? Suppose a member of the Soka Gakkai dies. Many friends and acquaintances come to his or her funeral and chant daimoku for the deceased. Those who struggled together with that person to accomplish their lofty mission and shared the hardships, joys, winter storms and mild springs, are themselves Buddhas, and they will all be there praying for their loved companion.

The Strict Law of Causality

One who does not have faith in the Lotus Sutra will instead find his hands firmly gripped by the guards of hell, just as the sutra warns, ". . . After he dies, he will fall into the hell of incessant suffering." How pitiful! The ten kings of hell will then pass judgment on him, and the heavenly messengers who have been with him since his birth will berate him for his evil deeds.

This relates a situation, the opposite of the preceding passage. The quoted portion appears in the Hiyu (third) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. It says quite clearly that people who oppose the faith in this sutra will end up in the hell of incessant suffering --- the most terrible of hells --- after they die. And instead of a thousand Buddhas, demons will be there to drag them away. No one would be happy to meet demons. Such is the great difference after death between those with faith in the Mystic Law in their lifetimes and those who opposed it. In life, people may wield unmatched power, accumulate great wealth, or enjoy a good reputation, but all that is nothing after death. Only their worth as humans remains. It is said that a female demon divests them of all their possessions and a male demon hangs them on a tree to determine the weight of their sins. Everything they have done --- that is, their karma --- is revealed just as it is, and they have to face its reward or retribution.

The "heavenly messengers" will censure them for their evil acts, and the "ten kings" will pass judgment on them. The heavenly messengers are the gods who stay with an individual from the moment of his or her birth. Their duty is to report all acts, both good and bad, to King Enma, the lord of hell. In this age they might be something like prosecutors. The ten kings of hell are said to try the dead beginning on the seventh day after death and continuing until the second anniversary of their passing away. King Enma is one of them --- something like the judges in today's courts of law.

It is possible to commit some evil act and get away with it, as far as the morals of society or the laws of the land are concerned. But never with the Buddhist law. The heavenly messengers, also called Dosho and Domyo, are always with their charge and constantly watch him. He can never elude them. This is what Buddhism teaches us, that the law of causality is always at work in the depths of our lives. No lies can go undetected in the world of Buddhism.

It is generally believed that hell is just a fable, contrived to make people rectify their conduct while they are alive. This may be the case with some of the more primitive representations we have from past ages of hell. But whatever the general belief, it is true that hell-like conditions exist in actual life. It is said undeniably that the world is filled with all kinds of suffering --- people anguished by the hardships and losses they must endure, people condemned to frustration because of their surroundings, people suffering terrible afflictions. Life continues through past, present and future, so the situation will not change a bit, even after one dies.

Whether dead or alive, one will always have to experience both hardship and joy in the depths of his being.

I mentioned the male and female demons who divest the dead of their possessions. They symbolize the fact that, according to the strict and constant law of causality, vanity is worth nothing after one dies. The only thing of value is the essential reality in the innermost core of one's life. The ten kings and the heavenly messengers are but a figurative way of teaching us that our physical and mental acts at each and every moment invariably become engraved in the karma of our lives. Though they are all fables, they are very enlightening ones indeed.

We can see, then, that a person who refuses to believe in or slanders true Buddhism causes his own life force to weaken with each moment. Eventually he will be completely drained of life force and find himself restrained from accomplishing anything, as if inextricably mired in a swamp. There are many dreadful things in the world, but nothing is more horrible than the hell of incessant suffering. It is said that if one were even to hear a description of that hell, he would cough up blood and die. True, this suggests the horrors of hell, but it also indicates that, in contrast to outward appearances, the misery in the depths of life is terrible beyond description.

Nothing is sadder and more miserable than to find one's very life a prison of agony, without the slightest energy or hope for the future. Such a person will fail in everything he does. The Goshō teaches that those who revile the votary of the Lotus Sutra may seem at first to receive no retribution, but they ultimately end in disaster. When a building is wrecked by a natural calamity of some sort, we can see the damaged parts and repair them. But we see nothing at all when it is rotting from within. If the rot spreads to the point that the house starts to crumble, it is almost impossible to repair. To slander the Lotus Sutra is to cause the palace of one's life to rot from within. This is most dreadful --- perhaps no less horrible than finding one's hands seized by the guards of hell. No matter what hardship or sorrow befalls you, never part with the Gohonzon. If you do, you will only be throwing away all your good fortune and utterly destroying the seed of Buddhahood within you.

Buddhism places strong emphasis on the last moment of life, for in the Buddhist view it contains the sum total of one's lifetime, and it is also the first step toward the future. All phenomena manifest the true entity; all the acts done during one's lifetime, both good and bad, decide the way one dies. It is almost frightening, for nothing can be hidden. The way one dies, whether peacefully or horribly, is a perfect reflection of the life he has led and a spotless mirror of his future. In his Reply to Myōhō-ama, Nichiren Daishonin wrote:

Ever since my childhood I, Nichiren, have studied Buddhism with one thought in mind. Life as a human is truly a fleeting thing. A man exhales his last breath with no hope to draw in another. Not even dew borne away by the wind suffices to describe life's transience. No one, wise or foolish, young or old, can escape death. My sole wish has therefore been to solve this eternal mystery. All else has been secondary.

This passage guides us in the attitude we need in order to live our irreplaceable life without any regret, and with total joy.

What are the most important matters? They are one's lifelong objective and the question of life and death. If we let our minds stray from those most basic things, and become enraptured in trivial affairs, nothing important can be gained. We need not become morose, but we should never forget the necessity to look soberly and sincerely straight at death and strive to live each moment to the fullest. How often today's writers and critics lament that modern humanity and civilization are drowning in "the luxuries of life." A frivolous way of life that ignores the gravity of death cannot bring true fulfillment. The Daishonin's words, "with the profound insight that now is the last moment of life," become all the more significant, now that our society is becoming so hopelessly confused.

Nichiren Daishonin talks about the hell of incessant suffering throughout the Goshō. But his almost too frequent reference to it, I believe, comes from his boundless mercy to do everything possible to keep people from falling into that hell. But what is the hell of incessant suffering really like? On Slandrous Acts states:

The eighth hell is avichi, the hell of incessant suffering.... Ringing it are seven great iron fortifications.... To the prisoners in this hell, those in the hell of scorching heat are like people

enjoying themselves in the sixth heaven. The stench of this hell is so noxious that the heavenly beings and people on the entire earth and in the six heavens of the world of desire would all die should they ever chance to smell it.... If the Buddha should but describe all of the sufferings in this hell, those listening to him would cough up blood and die. That is why the Buddha refrains from giving a detailed description.

Those passages, showing how deep life goes and how strict the retribution for slander is, really make us sit up and take notice. There is also the parable of the one-eyed turtle and a floating piece of sandalwood, a parable which is as profound as it is well known. The Reply to Widow Matsuno reads:

The turtle symbolizes ordinary people like us. Its lack of limbs signifies our lack of endowment with causes for good fortune. Its burning stomach denotes the eight hot hells of anger, and its freezing back the eight cold hells of greed. That the turtle has to stay at the bottom of the ocean for one thousand years represents the difficulty of extricating ourselves from the three evil paths. Every thousand years it comes to the surface, which signifies how rare it is to escape from the three evil paths and be born as human beings --- perhaps once in countless aeons --- and how rare it is to be born in Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime.

We are told here how difficult it is to escape the three evil paths of Hell, Hunger and Animality and be born in the human world. Having been fortunate enough to live as human beings now, we have all the more motive to take seriously what this passage says.

In the Face of Death

The other day I read an article by Jun'ichi Watanabe, a physician-turned writer, describing the behavior of an eminent surgeon when faced with his own death. An expert in abdominal surgery, the doctor had treated thousands of cancer cases. Then, ironically, he was found to have cancer himself. The discovery came too late, and he could do nothing but await his own death. He remained calm and composed at first, but as his condition declined he began to change.

At midnight a low growl would come from his room; then suddenly a scream would shatter the dead silence of the ward.

"No! No, I don't want to die!"

"Help me! Help me!"

The nurses would rush into his room and find the doctor in tears, kicking his legs and beating his fists against the bed like a child. Sometimes he would take things off the bed-stand and throw them across the room. At other times, his eyes filled with hatred, he would just lie and glare at his elderly wife, who stayed with him to look after him, and at the nurses who treated him.

"You hypocrites!" he would shout angrily at them. "You're thinking what fun you can have by yourself after I go. You're all just waiting around like vultures, glad that I'm going to die." Once on the rampage, no one could control him. It took the combined power of all the nurses and his wife just to pin him down and give him an injection to put him to sleep.

The next day the doctor would wake up and look around with eyes hollow and gaunt as if he had just escaped from hell. When an occasional visitor came, he would hardly say anything at all. At such times he seemed like a man who was looking death calmly in the face. When night came, however, he would again lose all control and become as violent as another Mr. Hyde. It seemed as if he was being alternately tormented by his daytime exhaustion and nightly hell. The physicians were completely taken aback --- they had never seen anyone struggle with such desperate fear of death as this doctor. Unable to remain indifferent, someone suggested that religion might give him some consolation. But he was in no state to accept any kind of religious faith. He simply continued to writhe in agony.

Was the doctor more frightened or cowardly than other people? No; there was no one who believed that. But there was no hope of his being cured. Death would definitely take him in a few more weeks and he knew it better than anyone else. The problem was that he was all too clearly aware of the fact.

He was like a criminal in death row; in a way, even worse. Even a condemned criminal still has that one chance in a thousand for reprieve, some slight hope that somehow his sentence might not be carried out. For the doctor, however there wasn't the tiniest glimmer of hope that he would live. He knew too much about medicine to expect any such thing.

He had devoted himself to medicine and for several decades had studied and accumulated professional knowledge. But all his knowledge was now completely worthless. All it did was make him more acutely aware of his own death. He had diagnosed and operated on thousands of cancer cases. All this experience only told him that he would soon breathe his last. There was not the slightest possibility for survival in which he could believe. His precious learning had turned into a demon that did nothing but torture him.

In despair even more intense than that of a condemned criminal, the doctor continued to writhe and cry in anguish until he finally breathed his last, as if exhausted of all his abusive language. There was no longer the slightest vestige of the lofty-minded scholar. Here was but an ordinary old man, egotistic and suspicious of everything, thrashing about in the horror of death. [Mainichi Shinbun (Tokyo: The Mainichi Newspapers, February 13, 1977)]

This fairly lengthy quotation brings into bold relief human frailty when faced with the final hurdle of death, a frailty which is part of our pitiful karma. Reading the article, I realized afresh how wonderful it is to be able to live aware of the philosophy of eternal life expounded by Nichiren Daishonin. Learning, genius, power, wealth, reputation, science, technology --- all become nothing when one is confronted by death. Faced with his end, man finds himself hopelessly overpowered, and there is nothing able to salve his conscience. That article and numerous other similar stories make us realize all the more clearly the significance of the phrase, "My sole wish has therefore been to solve this eternal mystery. All else has been secondary." Buddhism holds the answers to the questions man has struggled with since his beginning, the questions of death and the last moment of life. Buddhism is the philosophy of how to live, and every one of us, being human and existing as "beings-unto-death," should study it with equal zeal.

In his Exegesis on The True Object of Worship, Nichikan Shonin quotes the Great Teacher Dengyo as saying, "The unified perception of the three truths of life*_at the moment of death is entirely different from that during ordinary practice at ceremonies. For, at the last moment, death's agony comes quickly and grips the body with ever-increasing strength, and the mind becomes so confused that one can no longer distinguish between right and wrong." Here is something we must think of in our own lives. Nichikan Shonin continues, "Unless you master the essential practice that will free yourself from illusion and suffering at the moment of death, all ordinary learning is completely useless. ... At the last moment of your life you should chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo." This phrase indicates that "the essential practice" is the practice of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Only a life devoted to the Mystic Law will lead to the state of true peace and security that is described as "happiness in this life and good circumstances in the next."

*[To perceive the three truths as an indivisible entity --- ku (the spiritual or qualitative aspects of life), ke (all phenomena of life) and chu (essential, unchangeable entity of life) --- in a momentary state of life. T'ien-t'ai defined this unified perception of life as stemming from the correct practice of concentration and meditation.]

Just imagine that those thousand Buddhas extending their hands to all Nichiren's disciples who chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo are like so many melons or moon-flowers extending their slender vines.

Earlier we discussed the sentence in the Kambotsu (28th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra which states, "After his death, a thousand Buddhas will extend their hands...." Here the Daishonin says that this sentence was written for those who would believe and practice the Great Pure Law in the future, which meant all his disciples and believers. Just as melons or moon-flowers extend their "slender vines," the thousand Buddhas will extend their hands to support us, who embrace the Gohonzon, with all their might. We are, as it were, traveling aboard a ship as huge as the macrocosm, the ship of the Gohonzon. No other ship is as secure and powerful, for the blessings of the Gohonzon are as vast as the universe.

The quoted passage also says a great deal about the attitude leaders should have. The Buddhas extend their hands to prevent people from falling into hell or suffering from unbearable fear. This is the spirit we need when dealing with friends both inside and outside of our Buddhist organization. We should be constantly thinking of ways to let them enjoy their lives and to keep them from misery. To do that is to carry out the spirit of the Buddha, "to free him from all fear and keep him from falling into the evil paths." As we extend our hands to help others and encourage them, we are the "thousand Buddhas extending their hands." Just as melons or moon-flowers extend their vines, so must we extend our helping hands to our friends, always watching them with special care, and thinking of their problems as our own. This is the spirit of the leader, filled with love for other members and for our neighbors and for all mankind.

Life always has its ups and downs. Everyone meets with times of failure and defeat. But it is at exactly such times that the people around should go to help and encourage. In doing so, they perform the work of the thousand Buddhas, the work which I believe causes a change in individual karma and, in the long run, growth in our respective communities. I always think of this whenever I meet with members or non-members.

This Moment Decides the Future

My disciples have been able to receive and embrace the Lotus Sutra by virtue of the strong ties they formed with this teaching in their past existences. They are certain to attain Buddhahood in the future.

The Shinjikan Sutra states, "If you want to know the cause you formed in the past, observe the effect in the present. If you want to know the effect in the future, observe the cause you are forming now." Thus, we have been able to take faith in true Buddhism because of the strong ties we formed with the Gohonzon in our past existences --- the cause in the past. The fact that we have been able to receive and embrace the Gohonzon is the effect in the present, and at the same time it is the cause we are forming now. This cause makes it certain that we will attain Buddhahood --- the effect in the future.

It is truly mysterious that we have been able to receive and embrace the Gohonzon and are now practicing true Buddhism for kosen-rufu and to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. It is possible only because we accumulated good causes in our past existences. The seventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra reads, "In lifetime after lifetime they were always born together with their masters in the Buddha's lands throughout the universe." It is saying that we must have formed the cause by unbroken dedication to propagating the Mystic Law. That has enabled us to encounter the Gohonzon in this life --- the effect in the present.

Although you have been able to take faith in the Gohonzon, if you regard this only as the effect and nothing more, you are severing all the ties you once formed and cutting yourself off from the good fortune you have accumulated. It is important to understand that you must instead make that effect a cause for the future, a springboard for further growth. Only then can you cause your life to blossom in the future.

"My disciples have been able to receive and embrace the Lotus Sutra . . ." In this phrase, "receive" can be considered the effect received from the past. On the other hand, "embrace" is the cause aimed toward the future. To "embrace" means ceaseless effort and devotion, the continuous, unwavering practice of faith. Nichiren Daishonin means precisely that when he says, "To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But continuing faith will lead to Buddhahood."

The passage, "My disciples...", teaches us that the ties we formed in the past have led us to receive and embrace the Gohonzon, and that our acts to do so now guarantee that we will attain Buddhahood in the future. Here we see the processes of planting, nurturing and reaping the seeds of Buddhahood-processes which span all eternity. Some of you may wonder, "Some people cannot bring themselves to take faith in true Buddhism. Is it because they did not form ties in the past? Must we abandon all hope of saving them?" No, we should not. If one is able to hear Buddhism in this life, that is equal to having formed ties in the past. Man is not an entity inescapably bound and controlled by past karma. He is an independent being whose present state of mind can change his future in any way he pleases. Actually it is beyond anyone's capacity to know whether or not he formed strong ties with Buddhism in the past. The essential thing is the fact that we embrace the Gohonzon now. This is what The True

Entity of Life means by: "Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku." We do not chant daimoku because we are Bodhisattvas of the Earth. But we are Bodhisattvas of the Earth because we chant daimoku.

Be convinced, therefore, that you formed strong ties with Nichiren Daishonin as his true disciples in the past, and that you were born in this age with the pledge to spread the Mystic Law throughout the world. Live earnestly each and every moment with this conviction, so that you will be able to forge a path through life-a life which is an accumulation of moments of good fortune. This is fundamental to the spirit of Buddhism. Be firmly resolved that when you strive to attain kosen-rufu, you will prove yourselves as noble Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Keep this resolution as you devote yourselves wholeheartedly to your daily activities.

Upholding the Eternal Heritage

The heritage of the Lotus Sutra flows within the lives of those who never forsake it in any lifetime whatsoever --- whether in the past, the present or the future.

Earlier in this Goshu, Nichiren Daishonin explained that the ultimate law in life is Myoho-renge-kyo and that to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is to bring forth the law. In the passage above he is saying that this heritage is only transmitted through the continuous practice of faith. Just as parents blood is by nature transmitted to their children, it is equally certain that the heritage of the ultimate law flowing within the life of the original Buddha from the infinite past is transmitted to the lives of us, his true disciples. Thus the passage assures us that the heritage of the ultimate law also flows within our lives eternally. Because we embrace the Gohonzon and chant daimoku, our lives are entities of the ultimate law. The heritage of the ultimate law is never interrupted in the lives of those who continue to embrace the Gohonzon throughout the past, present and future.

Sairenbo had only recently become Nichiren Daishonin's disciple, and the Daishonin sensed a tendency in him to place greater emphasis on theory than on practice. It was probably for these reasons that the Daishonin wrote in this particular way, to remind Sairenbo that the continuous practice of faith is most important of all. The heritage of the ultimate law is passed on to lives elevated through faith to a level where perception and communication with the Buddha's life is not only possible, but assured. But to fully receive that heritage requires practice continuing not just throughout a single lifetime but throughout the three existences of life. It is difficult, of course, to maintain one's belief even for a single lifetime. Since past, present and future are contained in a single moment --- the present moment --- we must sustain our faith without interruption through a succession of moments, now and into the future. Although it may seem easy, there is actually nothing more difficult, or more important.

For us, the transmission of the ultimate law should be the solemn ceremony taking place in the depths of our lives --- a ceremony in which we perceive our own Buddhahood and bring it to the surface. Is there anything concrete about the way we inherit the ultimate law flowing within Nichiren Daishonin's life? The Daishonin passed away long ago. But he left behind the Gohonzon, the object of worship that combines the Person and the Law. We inherit the ultimate law from the Gohonzon, but we require no special ceremony. We only need to have a firm faith and chant daimoku to transfer the Gohonzon's life into our own. Or, putting it another way, we need only to bring forth the Daishonin's life --- Buddhahood --- from within ourselves.

Let me repeat this: Inheriting the Daishonin's life means bringing forth Buddhahood from within our own lives. The Gohonzon may be compared to a bird in the sky, while the Buddhahood in our own lives is like a bird in a cage. Bringing forth our own Buddhahood is like the caged bird responding to the song of the bird in the sky. The heritage of faith flows entirely within our own lives. Only through our own faith can we realize this.

There is no reality other than the life we have, which continues throughout past, present and future. Reality is not something someone else gives you. The only thing there is, is our wonderful life which, though changing from moment to moment, continues to exist eternally. The heritage of the ultimate law flows here and nowhere else.

But those who disbelieve and slander the Lotus Sutra will "destroy the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world." Because they cut themselves off from the potential to attain enlightenment, they do not share the ultimate heritage of faith.

All in all, then, there is no way for those who disbelieve or condemn true Buddhism to possess the heritage of the ultimate law. No matter how severe our situation may be, as long as we maintain strong life force through faith in the Gohonzon, we will someday be able to make the seed of enlightenment grow, ripen and bear fruit. You probably remember a news report not so long ago that a lotus seed that was found to be more than three thousand years old still retained enough life force to bloom and bear fruit. However, if one prevents the seed of his own Buddhahood from sprouting, he cannot expect it to bear fruit. Hence the Daishonin's statement that disbelievers and slanderers cut themselves off from enlightenment. "Destroy the seeds . . . in this world" means that no matter where they go they can never be saved. For them there is no place to escape. The only course open to them is hell.

The line, "destroy the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world," appears in the third chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Look again at the phrase, "in this world." It tells us that we can attain Buddhahood only in the world we are living in. Proof of enlightenment becomes manifest as we try to live sincerely and humanely. You will never, never attain enlightenment if you run away from society to some quiet place to meditate. Buddhahood exists within us as we live from day to day. The seed for Buddhahood inherent in all people is Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Those who derogate or refuse to believe in the Mystic Law will destroy the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world.

Perfect Unity

All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with one mind (itai doshin), transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation. When you are so united, even the great hope for kosen-rufu can be fulfilled without fail.

Here we learn that the heritage of the ultimate law flows within the group of believers who maintain perfect unity (itai doshin) among themselves. The passage is a concrete lesson in the way of practice to follow and thereby inherit the lifeblood which enables any and all people to attain enlightenment.

Then where in particular does the heritage of the ultimate law flow? The answer is given at the beginning of this Goshō, in which the Daishonin states, "The five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo were transferred from the two Buddhas inside the Treasure Tower, Shakyamuni and Taho, to Bodhisattva Jogyo, carrying on a heritage unbroken since the infinite past." In a literal sense, the heritage exists in the life of Jogyo, leader of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, whom Shakyamuni and Taho Buddhas entrusted with the propagation of the Lotus Sutra. From the standpoint of true Buddhism, the entity of the ultimate law is the life of Nichiren Daishonin himself, the reincarnation of the original Buddha from the infinite past who appeared as Bodhisattva Jogyo when Shakyamuni taught the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, the above passage concludes that the heritage, which in particular dwells within the Daishonin's life, flows in general within the group of his disciples who maintain perfect unity among themselves.

The quoted passage also makes it clear that the Buddha's lifeblood flows in the actions of people --- not those who act divisively or egotistically, but within the lives of those who chant daimoku and advance together toward the common goal of kosen-rufu. It is an important passage, for it shows a practical way for common people of little understanding to attain Buddhahood in the Latter Day.

"Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation." What is the objective that Nichiren Daishonin strove for as he propagated the Mystic Law? He did not intend to keep the heritage of true Buddhism to himself or just to transmit it to a limited number of people. He wanted to open the way to Buddhahood and pass the heritage on to all people --- those in his own country and throughout the world. He wanted to pass it on to mankind, and for all eternity. This was the spirit that underlay everything he did, and it shows us the fundamental difference between shoju and shakubuku. Shoju was the method used during the Former and Middle Days to transmit the True Law for all generations, but shakubuku in the Latter Day aims at enabling all people to attain Buddhahood.

With infinite mercy for all, Nichiren Daishonin established the Dai-Gohonzon as the ultimate entity of enlightenment. He taught us itai doshin (literally, many in body, one in mind) as the

spirit in which to carry on the practice and the movement. In the light of this teaching, the noblest aspect of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism lies in faith based on the spirit of itai doshin. Today in the Soka Gakkai we are firmly joined to the Gohonzon and dedicate ourselves to propagating the Mystic Law. The training and study we do is always undertaken within a fine, harmonious web of human relationships. The Soka Gakkai's very existence becomes extremely important in the light of this teaching of the Daishonin. Our organization carries out the lofty mission to achieve "the true goal of Nichiren's propagation."

Josei Toda used to say, "The organization of the Soka Gakkai is more important than my own life." Soka Gakkai members maintain perfect human harmony and transcend all differences between them. Ours is an organization which has unmistakably inherited the ultimate law of life --- the key to enabling all people to attain Buddhahood. I am certain Mr. Toda made his remark because he knew this all too well.

Any group, no matter what kind, has capabilities greater than the sum total of the individual abilities of its members. If each member is given the suitable position according to the principle of itai doshin, the group as a whole will be much more versatile than one would imagine. Think of a family, the smallest unit in society. Human culture and traditions are always created by groups or organizations and passed on down to posterity.

The Soka Gakkai is an organization established with the objective of enabling the individual to revolutionize his own life, attain enlightenment in this lifetime and carry out the great mission for kosen-rufu. That is why the organization is endowed with the powers and abilities of the Buddha, the ultimate law of life flowing through it in ceaseless torrents. You can see this immediately when you study the Soka Gakkai's development and the myriad examples of human revolution attained by the people who have woven its history. We are Mr. Toda's disciples. It is our foremost duty to respect, nurture and protect the organization of life-to-life unity he left us. The Soka Gakkai, the world of itai doshin, is the living organization of Buddhist practice and the training ground for human revolution in our day.

The Daishonin teaches us that the heritage of the ultimate law flows only in a group of people with the same faith, who work together in perfect unity. I think it is important to say a few words about the genuine nature and significance of itai doshin.

We frequently meet in order to encourage the movement for kosen-rufu, study the Goshō or make plans for events. We support and give guidance to each other. All this is itai doshin in miniature, and the Letter from Teradomari states: "Those who have a seeking mind should all gather and read this letter together." People's minds change from moment to moment, so our members meet to keep themselves oriented on the right path of faith. Then they split up and go their various ways, some to create an unshakable foundation in their homes, others to contribute to the prosperity of their respective communities. Then they gather again at a discussion meeting to seek the true way of Buddhism. Repeated meetings and partings are a practical way for the members to manifest the essence of Buddhism in their own lives. This, I believe, is what is meant by the phrase, "If itai doshin prevails among the people, they will achieve all their goals." The Soka Gakkai owes what it is today to the countless meetings and partings by members who were many in body but one in mind, firmly united with President Toda at their center.

The objective of our faith lies in the continuous revolution of our own lives. Kosen-rufu is just that revolution, aimed at contributing to the peace and culture of mankind. An organization, no matter what kind, which ceases to strive for continuous revolution --- which is really the accumulation of daily reform --- is but a living corpse with no future. Another thing makes our organization special: Kosen-rufu lies in an entirely different dimension from revolutions carried out solely for a certain class or group of people. Ours IS the crystallization of man's noblest endeavor, a universal, eternal revolution carried on to benefit all people on earth. By now you probably know that it is only the unity of itai doshin that makes such a revolution possible.

Itai doshin contains two important principles. The first, of course, is itai, or many different individuals. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism deeply respects each person's individuality, situation and character and shows the way to display one's particular abilities to the fullest. The Ongi Kuden says, "Cherry, plum, peach, and damson blossoms all have their own qualities, and they manifest the three properties of the life of the original Buddha without changing their own character." People, in other words, should give full play to their unique

capabilities as they struggle toward kosen-rufu. Their struggle brings about their own human revolution, and the circle of unity they form is the Soka Gakkai.

Because organizations must maintain internal order, they tend to reject individual differences and make their members conform as much as possible. Perhaps the best examples of such are the military and "in-family" groups. An "in-family" group may appear firmly united, but because in reality it forms an inner core closed to outsiders, it eventually grows unable to respond to the changes of the times. Although it seems to be one body, it usually becomes divided into countless opposing factions. It becomes corrupt and depraved eventually, giving rise to evil among the members. This explains why many religious bodies find themselves at a standstill. They have turned into "in-family" groups so poisoned with the evils of nepotism that they are unable to move. The members of the Soka Gakkai have always maintained mutual respect for each other and each other's special talents. I want you to carry on this noble tradition eternally. Each member has his own mission to accomplish in the land of the Buddha. We aim at a total revolution. In its ideal form, this revolution has people from all walks of life gathering together in the garden of the Soka Gakkai, each blossoming forth in a unique way. An association of fishmongers may be able to effect reform in the fish market, but they cannot achieve a total revolution. The total revolution will be achieved only when people with all sorts of characters and talents fully live up to their abilities as they scale the peak of kosen-rufu on into the coming century.

Gohonzon and Kosen-rufu - Our Foundation

The second principle of itai doshin requires that people different in body (itai) act in one spirit (doshin). This is the more important of the two principles. The phrase "transcending all differences among themselves" does not mean to reject differences. Rather, it repudiates failure of heart-to-heart communication between people. It rejects egotism and actions based only on personal feelings. Such attitudes lead people to emphasize their differences and finally cause them to sever their bonds. No spiritual bond can long exist in such disunited groups of people.

In contrast, fish and water are two totally different things, but fish cannot live for a moment without water. "To become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim" is to realize that our existence flourishes within, and even depends on, the beautiful tapestry of human relationships woven together with the people around us. We must treasure those relationships. "Water" then represents the human relations surrounding us --- the organization --- and "fish" indicates ourselves. Just as fish feel perfectly comfortable in the water they swim in, so must we merge with the group of itai doshin, respecting each and every member. Then we can 'become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim."

Buddhist teaching puts heavy emphasis on a strong sense of gratitude: gratitude to parents, teachers, society and mankind. The Buddhist regards our existence as being inseparably connected to all other forms of life. We learn from Buddhism that we must be as grateful for other people's existence as we are for our own. Realize that the principle of itai doshin is based on this teaching. But look at the society in which we live. It is filled with people who assert only their differences, and it is beset with conflict and selfishness, hostility and hate, discord and destruction. Like so many foxes and wolves, people cunningly, almost hungrily, watch for the chance to pounce on each other. We must see this for exactly what it is. We must not allow ourselves to give in to or be ridiculed by wicked people. This harsh reality totally surrounds us, but there is one remaining force capable of overcoming all viciousness and establishing a society in which true humanism prevails. It is ourselves, members of the Soka Gakkai. Indivisible and united in the spirit of itai doshin, we must advance toward the lofty goal willed to us all, together, by the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin.

Doshin (one mind) means to believe in the Gohonzon and to take the supreme goal of kosen-rufu as our own, personal mission. The Gosho tells us to be "of the same mind as Nichiren and says that his disciples should "form your ranks and follow him."

If people follow only their own subjective opinions and personal whims, they will become divided, both in body and mind, and find themselves in a whirlpool of complaints, discontent, hatred and jealousy. But when all stand together in the spirit of itai doshin, each one will be able to see how intensely the others are fighting, each in his own capacity. They will clearly see that members are taking the lead in their own spheres of action and work on their own,

and helping the whole movement one step at a time. Everyone is living the best way he can, constantly feeling purified and filled with new vigor. If we are aware of their individual efforts and feelings, we sense a new respect for them all, and at the same time try all the harder in our own positions to accomplish our own mission. Ours is a living organization because it is composed of just such people. It is only natural, therefore, that the heritage of the ultimate law flows within it in a broad, clear river of abundant joyful benefits. Until now the Soka Gakkai has continued to support its faith by the purest form of itai doshin --- a purity that is very difficult to appreciate if one is not a part of our organization. Part of my will for all who are members is that you preserve this tradition eternally and never destroy it.

On Itai Doshin, one of the best-known Gosho, states, "King Chou of Yin led 700,000 soldiers into battle against King Wu of Chou and his 800 men. Yet King Chou's army lost because of disunity while King Wu's men defeated him because of perfect unity." This episode took place in China about the eleventh century BC., an incident which marked the passage of one dynasty into the next. Although the age and historical background are far removed from us today, the story contains an eternal truth for human behavior. According to the Shih Chi (Records of the Historian) by Ssu-ma Ch'ien, King Chou of the Yin dynasty was a bloody tyrant. He was infatuated with a woman named Ta Chi and indulged in sensual pleasures day and night. He killed anyone who dared oppose him and sometimes made salted or dried meat of his victims' flesh. When his loyal retainer, Pi Kan, remonstrated with him, the king gouged out his heart. Naturally he cared nothing for the happiness of his people.

Yin had many countries under its control. One of them was Chou. Its king, Wen, was a wise ruler who enjoyed the confidence of the kings of other countries. When he died, his son, Wu, succeeded him. Following his father's last will, Wu took up arms against the tyrannical King Chou. His action was well-timed, as eight hundred lords with the same intent as he came to participate. King Chou commanded 700,000 soldiers in the battle against Wu. Wu's army was a motley group of lords from many different countries, but they were firmly united in the common desire to punish the abominable king for going against Heaven's will. Their morale was very high. In contrast, King Chou's troops way outnumbered King Wu's, but they had no will to fight. Actually, they were secretly glad that Wu was coming. When the expeditionary force arrived, they all rose together in revolt against their king and let Wu into their country without resisting at all. The Yin dynasty fell, and the Chou dynasty was born. Wu had won the hearts of the people and enjoyed their trust. From the very beginning his army had been united in itai doshin, which is why he succeeded so magnificently.

We, too, must advance in the spirit of itai doshin with strong faith in the Gohonzon, holding high the banner of human revolution. All other people will soon find that their only hope lies in our progress, and they will come and join in, one after another. Now is the time. If we are united in itai doshin, "even the great hope for kosen-rufu can be fulfilled without fail."

Kosen-rufu will not come our way if we merely sit and wait or repeat empty phrases like parrots. It can only be realized when we continuously practice our faith in the spirit of itai doshin. In this sense, can any religious body in this age other than Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai be called "the envoy of the Buddha, sent to carry out the Buddha's work" ? Which other group is carrying out "Nichiren's propagation" in our world? I declare that there is absolutely no other. Therefore, Soka Gakkai members will certainly obtain immeasurable benefits, as the Gosho states, "Not even the wisdom of the Buddha can fathom the blessings you will obtain." Our path in life is illuminated by both an important mission and great good fortune. March straight along this road until you finally enter the highest state of happiness and satisfaction.

The Pitfall of Arrogance

But if any of Nichiren's disciples should disrupt the unity of itai doshin, he will destroy his own castle from within.

Here Nichiren Daishonin points out that those disciples whose spirit is not one with his are like parasites in a lion's body and are enemies of true Buddhism. Since they break the unity of itai doshin, and thereby cut themselves off from the heritage of the ultimate law, their sin is extremely grave. In Buddhism the most serious of the five cardinal sins* is "causing disunity in the Buddhist community." Even then, the sin is still more deadly --- "slandering the True

Law." They are violating Myoho-rence-kyo --- the heritage of the ultimate law and the core of Buddhism.

*[The five most serious offenses in Buddhism. They are: 1) killing one's father; 2) killing one's mother; 3) killing an arhat; 4) injuring a Buddha, and 5) causing disunity among believers.]

In the final analysis, to be of a "different mind" is to go against Nichiren Daishonin's spirit. But those who sometimes seem to turn against the Daishonin do not do so intentionally. Then what makes some people develop strong, intractable opposition? The cause, I believe, is selfishness, personal feelings and conceit. In Shakyamuni's day some people turned traitor and disrupted the flow of Buddhism because of those reasons. Devadatta was one of them. He is said to have been a villain who committed three of the five cardinal sins. He was initially one of Shakyamuni's disciples, but later left the group of Buddhists, taking five hundred monks with him, and began to attack Shakyamuni and his disciples. What made him backslide and eventually caused him to fall into hell? The following passage from The Opening of The Eyes vividly describes the situation:

The World-Honored One scolded Devadatta to his face saying, "You are a fool! You drink the spittle of other people." Devadatta felt as if he had been shot in the heart with a poisoned arrow. In fierce resentment he said, "Gautama cannot be a Buddha. I am the heir to King Dronodana, an elder brother of the revered Ananda and a cousin of Gautama. No matter what evil I might have done, he should have admonished me in private. Instead he scolded me severely in the presence of a large assembly of people and heavenly beings. How can such a man rank among the Buddhas and bodhisattvas? Earlier he took my sweetheart away from me. This time he has humiliated me in the presence of a large assembly. From today on I am his arch enemy, for each and every lifetime I am born."

It is clear that Devadatta disrupted the unity of itai doshin out of rancor, which originated in a personal grudge. The immediate cause of his treachery was Shakyamuni's reproof at a place of Buddhist practice where many other disciples were gathered. There he was called a fool and reproached, and he resented it. How haughty he was, and how keenly he wished the admiration of others! Shakyamuni could see that, given such a nature, Devadatta would not attain enlightenment unless he did away with his arrogance. That is why the Buddha purposely scolded his cousin in front of everyone.

Shakyamuni knew Devadatta's heart inside and out. As the teacher, he sincerely wanted his pupil to grow. He wanted to correct Devadatta's wicked mind and purge the benighted nature in his life, which would otherwise cause him to fall into misery. There was nothing personal involved, he simply had to be severe in his guidance. The Buddha's harsh words were the expression of mercy for a single person. But Devadatta could not see that far. His arrogant mind was already so bent on fame and fortune that he rejected the guidance and help Shakyamuni offered him.

I know of many instances in which people have deviated from the path of human revolution out of pride. There may be times when someone harshly admonishes you or gives you severe, straightforward guidance. At such times tell yourself that you are standing at a crucial point which can decide the success or failure of your human revolution. President Toda often gave me extremely strict guidance. He would even scold me for mistakes other leaders had made. Whenever I look back on those days, I am filled with memories and deep gratitude to my late master. How I wish I could have had his severe guidance for at least ten more years!

We saw that the immediate cause of Devadatta's revolt was Shakyamuni's humiliating treatment in the presence of the large assembly. However, the original cause went back many years earlier, which comes out in Devadatta's remark, "Earlier he (Shakyamuni) took my sweetheart away from me." Devadatta came from a royal family. When he was young, he vied with Prince Siddhartha (Shakyamuni's name as a youth) for the hand of Princess Yashodhara, who was reputed to be the most beautiful woman in India, but he lost. We are told that it was because Siddhartha far excelled his rival. With all that, it might have been hard for Devadatta to accept the Buddha's words with an open heart. But his response was so utterly personal that revolt was completely unjustified. At any rate, we can see that his heart was full of rancor --- jealousy and hatred for his superior cousin, lingering over a lost love.

Now let us turn to Sanmibo, a disciple who turned against Nichiren Daishonin. Sanmibo was one of the leading disciples, but, like Devadatta, he disrupted the unity of the Daishonin's followers and finally died a violent death. About him the Daishonin states:

There was something extremely strange about Sanmibo. However, I felt that whatever I said about it would be taken by the foolish as mere jealousy of his wisdom, and therefore I refrained from speaking out. It was because he had a wicked mind that he met his doom during the great persecution. If I had scolded him more strictly, he might have been saved, but since it was much too mysterious I have not mentioned it before.

In this passage the Daishonin indicates an important point. He wanted to give guidance to Sanmibo and point out his errors, but his surroundings prevented him from doing so. Before he was aware of it, his disciples had created an atmosphere in which it would have caused more harm than good to scold Sanmibo. Sanmibo Nichigyo was an educated priest who had studied at Enryaku-ji temple in Kyoto, then the highest seat of learning in Buddhism. Learned and eloquent, he breezed to a brilliant victory in his debate with Ryuzobo, a famed scholar of the Tendai sect. He had the tendency, however, toward false pride in his talents and, at the same time, obsequiousness to social power. He lacked the true pride and determination to uphold the supreme teaching of Buddhism, no matter what. In his reply to this priest, the Daishonin writes, "In your letter you mentioned the great honor you had to give a lecture at the family temple of a court noble. But it seems very strange for you to say that kind of thing.... by speaking of your 'great honor, are you not in essence expressing your low opinion of me, Nichiren?" It seems that Sanmibo placed the Daishonin's Buddhism below the aristocratic authority of the country's religious center in Kyoto.

During the Atsuhara Persecution, Sanmibo was dispatched to the Fuji area to assist Nikko Shonin, who ranked below him. Then, becoming victim to the scheming of Gyochi, acting chief priest of Ryusen-ji temple of the Tendai sect, he turned against Nikko Shonin. The consequence you know well: "He met his doom," dying a violent death. I suspect he was not pleased about having to go and assist one of his inferiors who was leading the struggle against the persecution. On that struggle hinged the rise or fall of the Daishonin's Buddhist order. Even in such a decisive battle, he was preoccupied with his own resentment that he had not been assigned the leading position. He was completely dominated by egoism, and a desire for fame and fortune.

The Daishonin, of course, had long before discerned this dark tendency in Sanmibo's life. Once, when Sanmibo was in Kyoto propagating true Buddhism, the Daishonin wrote him a letter admonishing his inclination toward selfish pride. The Daishonin highly regarded Sanmibo's learning, but did not want it to go to his head and eventually cause him to backslide. He must have felt it necessary to scold Sanmibo on a number of occasions but, as I said, there was some turn of events which prevented him from doing so. In the final analysis, this brought him to his death. Remember that the principle, "There can be no discontinuity between past, present and future," stands, no matter what the age.

After the Daishonin's demise there were traitorous moves on the part of the five elder priests who had been the closest disciples of the Daishonin. After he had passed away, they tried to identify his teaching with the Tendai school and, shamelessly calling themselves followers of that school, they abandoned true Buddhism. It was not so much because they failed to comprehend the Daishonin's Buddhism, as because they wanted to preserve their authority in the already well-established Tendai sect. But they went about it by altering the Daishonin's teaching. You may know that the Daishonin wrote many of his Goshos in the simple Japanese syllabary. The five elder priests considered any Goshos not written in classical Chinese characters harmful to their sect's prestige. So, on the excuse that such writings were a disgrace to their late master, they either tore them up and made new paper of them or burned them. They were doing nothing less than trampling on the very spirit of Nichiren Daishonin, the original Buddha who consecrated his own life for the sake of all people.

Nichiro, one of the five, had taken part in the propagation campaign, spiritually exalted by his perfect master-disciple relationship with the Daishonin. For his effort he was even imprisoned. In his Letter to the Imprisoned Disciple, the Daishonin extols his strong faith. Then, after Nikko Shonin succeeded the Daishonin, even Nichiro turned against the second high priest and rejected true Buddhism. It is a sad story, but for us, becomes a very important lesson, which

believers in generations must remember as they advance toward kosen-rufu. Nichiro was very active during the lifetime of Nichiren Daishonin. But when Nikko Shonin became high priest, Nichiro turned on him. By so doing he violated the teaching, "There can be no discontinuity between past, present and future." This principle should be a mirror for all who propagate Buddhism, both now and in the future.

President Makiguchi, the founder of the Soka Gakkai, was a pioneer who built the foundation for kosen-rufu, propagating the True Law at the cost of his own life. In the face of oppression from the government he resolutely continued on, pitting himself against the persecution in order to spread true Buddhism until he was finally imprisoned. By then he had a large group of followers, but no sooner had he been imprisoned than many of them abandoned their faith. Then, when Mr. Toda became the second president, a number of Mr. Makiguchi's disciples turned away from true Buddhism. The leaders in the early days of the Soka Gakkai, nonetheless, were not swayed a bit by the turncoats. They had unshakable conviction in their faith, and it is through their unity that the Soka Gakkai has been able to move ahead in its unprecedented development. Today their names and their meritorious achievements stand out in the history of kosen-rufu.

These and other episodes, both ancient and recent, make it absolutely certain that those who try to take advantage of the Soka Gakkai in the present age are no better than subversives attempting to break up the spirit of itai doshin. There always have been, are, and will be, people who seek to satisfy their own selfish desires by using our organization. Some may try to use us for financial purposes. Others, completely underestimating the strength or purity of our organization, may try to use us as a means in their pursuit of fame and power. Such people exist both inside and outside the Soka Gakkai. Some also undoubtedly join simply out of curiosity, which can also be damaging.

In a time of trial, those who disrupt the unity of itai doshin "will destroy their own castle from within." As long as everything goes as they wish, they will go along with the organization and praise it to the skies. But if the Gakkai is attacked, or when things do not go as they hoped, it is this kind of person who will betray the Gakkai. I have seen such people become more and more miserable, their lives growing constantly darker. It is a very sad thing, but it is inevitable, a result determined by the law of causality.

[Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life](#)
- Shoji Ichidaiji Kechimyaku Sho -

Lecture 3 of 3 from [Selected Lectures on the Goshō](#), vol. 1.

Mercy for All Mankind

Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood. But instead they attacked me time and again, and finally had me banished to this island. You have followed Nichiren, however, and met with sufferings as a result. It pains me deeply to think of your anguish.

From this passage on, Nichiren Daishonin demonstrates concern for Sairen-bo, giving him deep encouragement and enfolding him with compassion. The heart of the Daishonin was filled with one thing, and one thing alone --- the infinitely merciful wish to let all people "share the heritage and attain Buddhahood." The only reason he so categorically denounced misleading teachings was to bring the heritage within reach of the people. He was especially severe with Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple, to whom many in those days looked up as a great spiritual and philosophical leader. The Daishonin carried through everything he did in righteousness to the end. He fought for the people, courageously, in utter disregard of his own life.

We of the Soka Gakkai carry on the struggle in the same spirit. The Daishonin fought to bring happiness to all the people in the world, and we follow in his footsteps to let them "share the heritage and attain Buddhahood." Being ourselves entities of the Mystic Law, whatever we do to encourage others to join us is a noble endeavor, whether we are aware of it or not. By encouraging them to join, we bring them the chance to inherit the ultimate law and let it take root firmly in their lives.

"But instead they attacked me time and again, and finally had me banished to this island." The country's leaders during the Daishonin's time were easily cajoled by the cunning, villainous priests into persecuting and finally banishing him to Sado Island. Exile on Sado was almost a living death, as the Goshō confirms, "Exiles to this island are seldom able to survive. Even if they do, they can never return home." He was forced to dwell in a small temple called Sanmado at Tsukahara. It was in a state of utter ruin. The howling wind swept through the wide gaps in the roof and walls. Any other person would have felt as if he were living in hell itself, but the Daishonin's heart was filled with joy. He felt the kind of joy that could only be felt by the original Buddha. In spite of being in such terrible surroundings, or rather, because he found himself there, he could perceive people's misery all the more acutely. That sense made him want to bring them happiness and bring the merciful light of his Buddhism to shine over the whole earth, a Buddhism as bright and powerful as the sun.

The Daishonin's mercy takes on added significance and depth from the fact that he wrote this important Goshō, the Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life, while on Sado Island. In spite of being made to live in the worst environment imaginable, he recharged and polished his life all the further to leave unfading landmarks of true Buddhism that would guide mankind for eternity. Perhaps only the original Buddha could achieve this, but we nonetheless must try to follow suit. The more trying and harsh our circumstances become, the more faith and courage we must call forth.

"You have followed Nichiren, however, and met with sufferings as a result." Nichiren Daishonin was going through persecution that came at him from all over the land. Flames of hatred roared up against him from all quarters. Under these circumstances Sairenbo dared to follow the Daishonin and, as a result, he too met with suffering. We do not know for certain what agonies he underwent, but it is certain that he was a man of great courage. The kind of attacks that caused him such pain were aimed less at him as an individual than they were part of a greater persecution to which the Daishonin's entire Buddhist order was subjected. Sairenbo stood his ground, and continued to follow his master. Such perseverance must have required extraordinary conviction. On the other hand, his faith was undoubtedly put to a real test.

The Ongi Kuden, interpreting the phrase "to follow this master and study," which appears in the tenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, says, "To follow means to believe and accept." In another part it explains that to follow means to devote both mind and body to the Lotus Sutra. Thus, in saying, "You have followed Nichiren...", the Daishonin was offering deep encouragement to Sairenbo, the man who shared the greatest hardship his master ever had to suffer. To me, one of the reasons that the Daishonin was not only a peerless master but a source of warm, human inspiration was his capacity for unbending sternness --- which in itself indicates concern --- combined with a limitless, personal interest in all his followers.

What Nichiren Daishonin went through was no ordinary abuse. It was a fierce attack by senshō zojōman, the third and worst of the three powerful enemies.* The authorities of some of the religious groups had schemed and prevailed upon the government to publicly punish the Daishonin. The entire nation was like a hive of angry bees swarming in hatred around him. Sairenbo made his commitment to follow the Daishonin right at that point, at a peak of his distress and unpopularity. And Sairenbo never faltered, despite the trials he had to face. At the same time, Sairenbo's courage and perseverance made it possible for the Daishonin to place unqualified confidence in him. Josei Toda used to say, "I trust only those people who have stuck to their faith through thick and thin for at least twenty years --- especially those who have overcome hardship after unbearable hardship. I trust them with my very life." I also remember Dr. Toynebee saying during one of our talks, "I can correctly appraise a person's value only when I have reviewed the past twenty years of his life."

*[Three types of people described in the Kanji (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra who will persecute those who propagate the sutra in the evil age after the Buddha's death. They are: 1) lay people ignorant of Buddhism who denounce and persecute the votaries of the Lotus Sutra; 2) arrogant and cunning priests who slander them; and 3) influential figures who induce those in power to exile or execute them.]

"It pains me deeply to think of your anguish." This sentence expresses the Daishonin's very personal consideration for his disciple. He knows the terror that must have gripped Sairenbo's

heart, and understands the mental conflict and indignation that must have been raging within him. He thinks of this disciple's distress even more than his own suffering, which is possible only from the heart of the original Buddha.

People of "Pure Gold"

Gold can neither be burned by fire nor corroded or swept away by water, but iron is vulnerable to both. A wise person is like gold and a fool like iron. You are like pure gold because you embrace the "gold" of the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra reads in part, "Sumeru is the loftiest of all mountains. The Lotus Sutra is likewise the loftiest of all the sutras." It also states, "The good fortune of the believer cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water."

Gold is one metal that will not oxidize even in fire, nor can it be corroded by water. And, because of its density, it is not even budged by a flood. In contrast, iron rusts and eventually disintegrates in either fire or water. A wise person, therefore, is one who, like gold, does not waver the slightest in his faith, no matter what suffering he meets or how difficult his life becomes. A fool, on the other hand, is as vulnerable and corruptible as iron.

Fire and water are like the trials we meet in daily life. The Goshō, The Eight Winds, reads, "A truly wise man will not be carried away by any of the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honor, praise, censure, suffering and pleasure. He is neither elated by prosperity nor grieved by decline." Most people lose their integrity when they receive prosperity, honor, praise or pleasure, and they become morose in the face of decline, disgrace, censure or suffering. Fire and water are symbols of the temptations and troubles of this constantly changing world. Unswayed by praise or blame, we must not let them move us, but instead, we must advance straight along our path of faith, making the life we live shine like polished gold.

Because of his faith in true Buddhism, Sairenbo went through suffering as withering as a fire and as relentless as a flood. But he never gave in. He upheld his faith to the end. That is why Nichiren Daishonin praises him, saying, "You are like pure gold." A passage in the "Precepts for Youth" written by President Toda states, "For a wise person it is a shame to be praised by a fool. But for him to be praised by the Buddha is a lifelong honor." I hope each of you will steadily lead your life in your own way and be worthy of praise from the Daishonin.

"Pure gold" is talking about those of unquestionable integrity of faith and practice. The test is whether a person has the insight to get to the core of things, whether he can carry through his faith while living a truly humane life, and whether he can keep on the path of righteousness to the end. I hope all of you will become people with insight and conviction based on Buddhism, who can discern the truth of things and who never falter or doubt, no matter what may happen. When the Daishonin was banished to Sado, quite a few of his disciples began to doubt, wondering whether his Buddhism was really true or not. However, it was precisely because he was exiled to Sado that he could prove in the way he responded to exile that he was the original Buddha and was able to complete so many important works. None who only saw into superficial aspects of what was happening could have anticipated this.

Much, much later, when Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda were imprisoned, once more many followers began to doubt and eventually abandoned their faith. More than thirty years have passed since the Soka Gakkai was fiercely oppressed by the Japanese military authorities, and during this period our organization has achieved phenomenal growth. Looking back, we can see profound significance in Mr. Makiguchi's death in prison. He left us with the spirit of determination to propagate the Law even at the cost of our lives. It was also in prison that Mr. Toda discovered that Buddha is life itself, awakening to his mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth. Thus, even the cruel, wartime oppression had considerable meaning. It was through that persecution that the spiritual core of the Soka Gakkai solidified. It produced the seed which has since blossomed into our organization today. Continue to live as people of "pure gold," no matter what situation you may face. People of pure gold will eventually reveal their inner light and their true ability, no matter where they may be.

"Because you embrace the 'gold' of the Lotus Sutra" means that we are able to walk a golden path only because we embrace the Lotus Sutra, the highest philosophy of life. As the Goshō states, "If the Law is supreme, so is the person who embraces it." Buddhism teaches that the content of one's life is determined by the quality of the belief he upholds, whether it is noble or base, deep or shallow. We have already received the Gohonzon and based our lives on it.

This is the supreme teaching of which the Buddha of the Latter Day, Nichiren Daishonin, declared, "So long as men of wisdom do not prove my teachings to be false, then I will never accept the practices of the other sects !" There is no alternative; we must make the Gohonzon part of us throughout our lives, and it will take us on a golden journey in life.

Both quotations from the Lotus Sutra appear in the twenty-third chapter, Yakuo-hon. "Sumeru is the loftiest of all mountains. The Lotus Sutra is likewise the loftiest of all the sutras," extols the Lotus Sutra. The sentence, "The good fortune of the believer cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water," concerns the good fortune of those who receive and embrace that sutra. President Toda explained that "fire" in this sentence indicates the fire of desire and that "water" denotes the water of suffering. The Ongi Kuden, interpreting the same phrase, states that "fire" represents the flames of the hell of incessant suffering and that "water" signifies the ice of the hell of unspeakable cold. In any case, the second quotation clearly tells us that the life of each person who embraces the Gohonzon will be illuminated by good fortune and he will find absolute happiness. Neither his fortune nor happiness can be disturbed by any of the fires or floods in life.

Bonds in the Depths of Life

It must be ties of karma from the distant past that have destined you to become my disciple at a time like this. Shakyamuni and Taho Buddhas certainly realize this truth. The sutra's statement, "In lifetime after lifetime they were always born together with their masters in the Buddha's lands throughout the universe," cannot be false in any way.

The fact that Sairenbo became Nichiren Daishonin's disciple during the most severe persecution in the Daishonin's lifetime cannot be understood in terms of worldly relationships. That is why the Daishonin states, "It must be ties of karma from the distant past that have destined you to become my disciple at a time like this."

"Shakyamuni and Taho Buddhas certainly realize this truth." Literally, this means that since the Daishonin is an ordinary person, he does not himself realize the fact but that Shakyamuni and Taho, being Buddhas, do. More than that, however, it means that the eternal law of Buddhism reveals that Sairenbo shared the Daishonin's difficulties because of the deep bonds they had formed in the past.

"In lifetime after lifetime they were always born together with their masters in the Buddha's lands throughout the universe." This is a well-known passage from the seventh chapter, Kejoyu-hon, of the Lotus Sutra. According to this chapter, in a distant past called sanzen-jintengo a Buddha by the name of Daitso expounded the Lotus Sutra. He had sixteen sons, and taught each of them the Law. They in turn preached the Law to as many people as there are grains of sand in six hundred billion Ganges Rivers, forming a master-disciple relationship with all. Since then, in lifetime after lifetime these people were continually born together with their masters in the Buddha's lands throughout the universe. They heard the teaching, and practiced Buddhism together with their masters. Three thousand years ago, the sixteenth of those sons came into the world as Shakyamuni and attained enlightenment. At that time the people he had taught in the past existences were also born into this world, heard him expound the Law, and attained Buddhahood.

In a word, the quotation from the Kejoyu chapter confirms that the master and his disciples are always born in the same world to practice Buddhism together. In Japan, Nichiren Daishonin made his advent in the Kamakura era. So Nikko Shonin and many other disciples and followers appeared during the same period and devoted themselves to spreading the Mystic Law. Therefore, Nichiren Daishonin is the "master" in the Latter Day of the Law.

How, then, should we read the passage from the Kejoyu chapter after the Daishonin's death? By inscribing the Dai-Gohonzon, Nichiren Daishonin provided the answer for us and our future generations. Also, he transmitted the entirety of his teachings to Nikko Shonin, his immediate successor. We live together with Nichiren Daishonin when we worship the Gohonzon enshrined at our own homes with the same attitude we have toward the Dai-Gohonzon. Hence the statement of the Kejoyu chapter. We are now fighting for kosen-rufu because we are brothers and sisters joined by the deep bond of the Mystic Law we have formed in the past. What strengthens our relationship is the prayer that we offer to the Gohonzon, with the same mind,

as well as the mental and physical struggle we undergo together to save mankind and attain kosen-rufu.

At times the Soka Gakkai may enjoy smooth sailing; at other times it may face a fierce wind. No matter what, stay firm within the Soka Gakkai and grow together with it. The karmic relationship we have shared since the distant past has destined us to become Soka Gakkai members. Therefore, live your whole life together with me and together with the Soka Gakkai so that, with the Gohonzon's mercy, we may be born again together and enjoy the happiest of possible lives.

The quotation from the Kejōyū chapter is very significant from the viewpoint of faith. Whether we are true disciples of Nichiren Daishonin or not depends on how we display the spirit of that sentence in our practice. There are many kinds of relationships: flesh-and-blood relationships between parents and children or brothers and sisters, work relationships between superior and subordinates, social relationships between friends or teachers and students. These are very important relationships, and the happiness and prosperity of families and society rest on whether those ties remain strong and whether individuals can associate with each other on a constructive basis or not. But of all human relations, that between master and disciple is the deepest and most important. Only through the master-disciple relationship can we learn and teach each other how to develop ourselves as human beings and how best to deal with life. This is the only life-to-life bond which continues for all eternity and which remains firm no matter where we may be.

Ties based on common interests collapse when interests diverge. Relationships forced upon us by external circumstances all change according to the time and place. However, the symphony played by master and disciples in one mind, creating harmony in the depths of their lives, will send forth its echoes throughout the universe and on into eternity. We are all legitimate disciples of Nichiren Daishonin. And now growing numbers with pure faith assemble in perfect harmony in countries around the world. You should have the pride and conviction to know that this is the purest crystallization of human relationships ever achieved in the history of man.

Whenever I read the quotation from the Kejōyū chapter, my heart is rent by the memory of Mr. Toda's words to his late master at the second memorial service on November 17, 1946:

Your mercy was so boundlessly great that you even took me to prison with you. Because you did so, with my very life I was able to read the phrase in the Lotus Sutra which states, "In lifetime after lifetime they were always born together with their masters in the Buddha's lands throughout the universe." The wonderful result was that I awoke to the mission of Bodhisattvas of the Earth and could understand even a little of the meaning of the Lotus Sutra. Nothing could have made me happier.

Even in prison, Mr. Toda visualized the Gohonzon and chanted daimoku to it sincerely. As a result, he discovered himself in perfect fusion with the Gohonzon as the passage from the Kejōyū chapter reads. Also, he realized his deep sense of mission, with which he would devote his remaining years to spreading faith in the Gohonzon. "Your mercy was so boundlessly great" and "Nothing could have made me happier" are the expressions of his pure, genuine faith in the Gohonzon. Mr. Toda's struggle reminds me that every individual can feel the statement of the Kejōyū chapter with his faith in true Buddhism.

"The Buddha's lands throughout the universe" indicate worlds inhabited by human beings. In theory all forms of life are entities of *ichinen sanzen*, but only the human being can reform and direct himself toward attaining Buddhahood. Therefore, we can be born as humans in world after world and devote ourselves to the construction of a Buddha's land in each lifetime. This is the greatest good fortune. According to the third chapter, *Hiyū-hon*, of the Lotus Sutra, those who slander the sutra will sometimes be born as stray dogs, emaciated and lean, hated and scorned by others. At other times they will be born as asses, destined to forever carry burdens on their backs, beaten with sticks. At still other times they will receive a serpent's body and wriggle about on their bellies, shunned. In contrast, we will always be born to live a joyful life, strolling, as it were, in the beautiful garden of our hearts, enjoying music that rings from within our lives. We are able to lead the noblest life possible. It is a remarkable achievement that deserves our most grateful thanks. It gives all the more reason to earnestly ponder what we must do in this life.

A Buddha's land is not some particular part of the universe where the Buddha resides. The principle of the oneness of life and its environment teaches that the condition of a land depends on the entities who dwell there. Thus, where we pursue the truths of Buddhism with firm faith in the Gohonzon is transformed into a land of eternal enlightenment. The Buddha's land is a place where master and disciple strive together in perfect unity.

"The Buddha's lands throughout the universe" indicates that such lands exist everywhere in the universe. Mr. Toda used to tell us his grand view of the cosmos in a straight-forward manner: "I'll continue to do shakubuku until we attain kosen-rufu on this Earth. Then I'll go to another planet and do the same thing." According to Buddhism, the Buddha's land is not limited to the Earth; it exists across the universe and throughout time.

Modern astronomy seems to endorse the Buddhist view. Scientists have asserted the possibility of cosmic dust floating between nebulae to form the building blocks of life. We may assume, therefore, that among the myriad stars many are inhabited by beings as advanced as man. This, I believe, is what "the Buddha's lands throughout the universe" indicates. Be convinced that we will always be born in one or another of the Buddha's lands spread throughout the universe and that there we will be able to devote ourselves to building an ideal human society.

No Enlightenment without Practice

How admirable that you have asked about the transmission of the ultimate law of life and death! No one has ever asked me such a question before. I have answered in complete detail in this letter, so I want you to take it deeply to heart. The important point is to carry out your practice, confident that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the very lifeblood which was transferred from Shakyamuni and Taho to Bodhisattva Jogyo.

Nichiren Daishonin praises Sairenbo for having asked this vital question, which no one had ever asked before. Then he stresses that "the important point is to carry out your practice, confident that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the very lifeblood which was transferred from Shakyamuni and Taho to Bodhisattva Jogyo." The Daishonin thus emphasizes the importance of the seeking spirit, and at the same time gives his disciple profound guidance so that he could elevate his state of life and live the life of that spirit.

Perhaps one of the best-known stories about a seeking spirit is that of Sessen Doji and the particular process by which he attained enlightenment. Sessen Doji was practicing austerities in search of the Law when he heard a voice say, "All is changeable; nothing is constant. This is the law of birth and death." Certain that the verse contained the law for enlightenment he had so seriously been seeking, he beseeched the demon which appeared in front of him to tell him the rest of the verse. The demon --- actually Taishaku in disguise --- looked horrible and lowly. Why did Shakyamuni, in telling this story, have such an abominable creature enter the scene? It may have symbolized the many crimes and evils widespread in Shakyamuni's day. Shakyamuni may also have wanted to teach that we must seek the law on the basis of its philosophy, not on the appearance or station of the person who preaches it.

We can look deeper into the significance of the story. The demon demanded warm human flesh as the price for its teaching. Sessen Doji, by offering his own body to the demon, was finally able to hear the rest of the verse. This lesson could not be clearer: seekers of Buddhism should be prepared to offer even their own lives for the sake of the law. But why was it that the price was human flesh? Why did Taishaku, disguised as the demon, demand it? To find the answer, recall the latter half of the verse the demon told Sessen Doji. It reads, "Extinguishing the cycle of birth and death, one enters the joy of nirvana." This represents extinguishing the suffering of birth and death in the phenomenal world and entering the unshakably happy state of nirvana in which there is neither birth nor death. This is a Hinayana doctrine, and it does not come anywhere near the highest teaching, the Lotus Sutra, much less Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. However, the verse contains an eternal truth in teaching us not to be blinded by births and deaths in the world, but instead to seek nirvana in the depths of those phenomena.

In order to truly understand the teaching, therefore, Sessen Doji first had to rid himself of the tendency to cling to his physical self. This was where the demon came in. The demon appeared and demanded that Sessen Doji give him human flesh. That demand was itself the answer to his quest. When he resolved to offer himself to meet the demon's request, he

became qualified to hear the latter half of the verse or, right then and there, he attained enlightenment.

Some who heard the Buddha explain this were incapable of comprehending it. For them Sessen Doji's act of offering his body was the substance of that teaching. The abundance of parables in the sutras reflects an attempt to make the philosophy comprehensible to all people. To go a step further, the fact that the demon would not preach the law until Sessen Doji vowed to offer his body is saying that enlightenment lies only in practice. Aside from the degree of Sessen Doji's enlightenment, his act tells us that Buddhism exists only within human behavior. Had he not offered his body for the sake of the law, he would not have been able to attain enlightenment, no matter how profound a teaching he came across. Without practice, no one can acquire the law of Buddhism. For Buddhism is a philosophy that was systematized only to reveal the enlightenment the Buddha attained after many long years of practice.

While it is true that Buddhism embodies a profound philosophy of life, and we must not depreciate the intellectual side, in its essence Buddhist doctrines enlarge on the Buddha's own enlightenment --- enlightenment which can be acquired only through practice. Buddhism is not just a compilation of abstract, theoretical teachings. It is a dynamic guide to a better life, the way to live most humanely, and how to reform ourselves. Since Buddhism is the true way of life, we can naturally find a profound philosophy behind it. Therefore, the heritage of the ultimate law of life exists only within our own lives. The spirit of this Goshō lives only within a life that continues to grow from day to day and month to month.

"Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō . . . was transferred from Shakyamuni and Taho" tells us that the entity of the Lotus Sutra manifested by the two Buddhas in the Treasure Tower is Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō. Nichiren Daishonin was aware that Sairenbo, a former scholar of the Tendai school, tended to see only the literal interpretation of the Lotus Sutra. He reiterates here, therefore, that the ultimate of the Lotus Sutra is Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō.

"The very lifeblood which was transferred . . . to Bodhisattva Jogyō." Here again the Daishonin emphasizes the same point. Bodhisattva Jogyō, who was entrusted with the mission of spreading the Law during the ceremony of the Lotus Sutra, is the supreme leader of propagation in the Latter Day. It follows therefore that the teaching he spreads is the one and only True Law for that age.

The Functions of the Mystic Law

The function of fire is to burn and give light. The function of water is to wash away filth. The winds blow away dust and breathe life into plants, animals and human beings. The earth nourishes the grasses and trees, and heaven provides nourishing moisture. Myōhō-renge-kyō too works in all these ways. It is the cluster of blessings brought by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

In this passage the Daishonin explains that the functions of earth, water, fire, wind and ku are themselves the workings of Myōhō-renge-kyō --- the blessings brought by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Earth, water, fire, wind and ku are the basic constituents of all things in the universe. They are called the five elements, which by inference are represented by the five characters of Myōhō-renge-kyō. On the Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas states, "When Shakyamuni Buddha was still a common mortal, at a time more distant than gohyaku-jintengo, he perceived that his body consisted of earth, water, fire, wind and ku, and he immediately attained enlightenment." "His body consisted of earth, water, fire, wind and ku" is another way of saying that "his body consisted of Myōhō-renge-kyō."

Buddhism is in part the declaration to mankind that Myōhō-renge-kyō --- the ultimate law of all things --- does not exist outside the phenomenal world, and the five elements that make up the physical world are themselves Myōhō-renge-kyō. The Lotus Sutra teaches that this world is itself the land of eternal enlightenment, that a common mortal can attain Buddhahood just as he is, that the nine worlds and Buddhahood are mutually inclusive, and that suffering leads to nirvana. All of these are revolutionary philosophical concepts, and they all originate in this single insight that is so basic to Buddhism.

Buddhism does not exist apart from this world; any system of religious thought that evades the realities of life and concentrates on fleeting pleasures or escapism, or ends up with dreams of heavenly pastures, is powerless to help the plight of man. How should we deal with our

constant, and often agonizing, reality? How should we live in the tumult of society? What can we do to open the path from chaos to a bright future? It is by seeking out answers to these questions that we can discover the revitalizing power of Buddhism. Religions that teach escapism or resignation, or religions that exist only in ceremony, are not religions in the true sense of the word.

Our movement has, from the beginning, advanced together with the masses, and today, it continues to be borne forward by a broad section of the populace. It lives among them and supports them in their sorrows and joys, sharing their sufferings and pleasures. Maintain this constant path for the Soka Gakkai, and always be proud in following it. It is the road Presidents Makiguchi and Toda built for us and led us to. No matter what others may say, let us proceed without fear along the Soka Gakkai's noble path and live the most precious life of all.

To go back to the text, the above passage enumerates the functions of the five elements. Their physical workings are exactly as the passage describes, but I feel that we must also study them in the light of the phrase, "Myoho-renge-kyo too works in all these ways. It is the cluster of blessings brought by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth."

First, consider fire. The text says, "The function of fire is to burn and give light." What does this mean for the life philosophy? A careful answer is given in the section of the Ongi Kuden concerning the first chapter, Jo-hon, of the Lotus Sutra. It states that "fire" means the fire of enlightened wisdom. "Giving light" is what wisdom does as it adapts to each new circumstance, and "burning" relates to the unchanging law of the universe. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself possesses both the virtue of burning and of giving light. The Ongi Kuden goes on to say that we who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo "can illuminate the darkness of suffering in life and death and can eventually see clearly the fire of nirvana's wisdom." It also says that we "can burn the firewood of desires and reveal the fire of enlightened wisdom." Since flames burn upward, fire represents Bodhisattva Jogyo, as jo means "upward."

"The function of water is to wash away filth." This is the function of washing away evil karma and eliminating the five impurities of life.* It symbolizes life's innate power --- coming from the Mystic Law --- to purify itself. Water represents Bodhisattva Jyogyo, jyo meaning to purify. The many evil deeds we committed in past existences destine us to suffer for countless lifetimes in succession. When we take faith in the Gohonzon, however, all that cumulative suffering comes to us all at once here in the present, but with far less intensity. This is the principle of lessening karmic retribution. When you flush water through an old hose, all the dirt in it is washed out the end. You may have to undergo hardship after hardship during this lifetime, but after the last dregs are purged, you will be able to live in comfort for the rest of your life and accumulate great good fortune.

*[They are: 1) impurity of the age caused by war, natural disasters, etc.; 2) impurity of thought, or illusion, caused by confusion in philosophy and religion; 3) impurity of desires, or ugly tendencies such as greed, anger and stupidity; 4) impurity of the people, weak, both physically and spiritually, and 5) impurity of life itself.]

Third, "The winds blow away dust" means to sweep away the difficulties that occur during our lifetime and the obstacles that try to block our path of faith. Just as the winds blow away dust and dirt, so can we clear away obstacles and difficulties by chanting powerful and resounding daimoku. The winds represent Bodhisattva Muhengyo, muhen meaning "without bounds." The Daishonin says that the winds also "breathe life into plants, animals and human beings." From old, wind has symbolized the vitality of nature and the universe, blowing the breath of life into all things.

Fourth, "The earth nourishes the grasses and trees" indicates the stabilizing factor of life. Just think of how life works. Nothing is more complicated or delicate. Our body, for instance, maintains a temperature that averages about 36.5°C. A fever, even if only two or three degrees above normal, feels uncomfortable. It is a wondrous system that maintains our temperature at the same level, except in times of illness, when it changes to tell us that something is wrong. The thoughts and feelings in our mind change from moment to moment, but always with well-coordinated balance. The stability-maintaining function of our mind and body represents Bodhisattva Anryugyo, anryu meaning harmonious support.

Finally, "heaven provides nourishing moisture." "Heaven" here corresponds to ku, the fifth element. Rather than any of the Four Bodhisattvas, it symbolizes Myoho-enge-kyo itself. Just as heaven lets life-giving rain fall upon all things, so Myoho-enge-kyo bestows its benefits on all phenomena and is the fundamental force by which they work.

A passage similar to the one above appears in the Ongi Kuden:

Now Nichiren and his disciples who chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo are all Bodhisattvas of the Earth. The benefits of the Four Bodhisattvas are as follows: The natural function of fire is to burn things [Jogyo], that of water to purify [Jyogyo], that of wind to blow away dust and dirt [Muhengyo], and that of earth to nourish plants and trees [Anryugyo]. The roles of the Four Bodhisattvas are not the same, but all of them are derived from Myoho-enge-kyo. The Four Bodhisattvas dwell underneath, and T'ien-t'ai's interpretation in the Hokke Mongu speaks of "underneath" as "the ultimate depth of life, that being the absolute reality." That the Bodhisattvas of the Earth dwell underneath means that they dwell in the truth.

Fire burns; water cleanses; wind blows away dust and dirt, and the earth supports plants—all these natural functions correspond to the functions of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

What is the significance of the functions of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth in terms of our daily life? To fight for happiness, consuming our own life force; to carry on the movement to purify others' lives as well as our own; to clear away the ugliness in society just as the wind blows away dust; to become an indestructible pillar in which anyone can place full confidence --- all of these are the natural functions of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth need never to be told to do anything by anyone. They work spontaneously for the benefit of the people and society, upholding the philosophy of the Mystic Law. It is a natural duty, which they sense within their own lives. Where does that sense of mission come from? Where in our hearts do the Bodhisattvas of the Earth dwell? Nichiren Daishonin explains this by quoting T'ien-t'ai's words—that they dwell in "the ultimate depth of life, that being the absolute reality." In other words, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth dwell in Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the entity which reigns over all the spiritual functions in man. By chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we bring its life force from within ourselves. We manifest the ultimate entity of our life and use our inner life force to improve our lives and society as we carry out our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. In the final analysis, the functions of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are those of Myoho-enge-kyo. So, when we manifest ourselves as the entities of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we become by our actions Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and we join the ranks of people who continue this unparalleled odyssey in the eternal current of life.

Mission as a Great Bodhisattva

This discussion reminds me of two episodes which Josei Toda personally experienced in prison, especially the second. On New Year's Day, 1944, he began alternately to chant daimoku and read the Lotus Sutra, visualizing the Dai-Gohonzon enshrined at the Head Temple, Taisekiji. At the beginning of March, he was reading the first chapter, Toku-gyo-hon, of the Sutra of Infinite Meaning, the sutra introductory to the Lotus Sutra itself. When he came to a twelve-line verse consisting of thirty-four negative descriptions of the Buddha's entity, he suddenly became enlightened to the truth that the Buddha is life itself. He could not repress the profound emotion which kept welling up within him. This was the first episode.

Spring went by, then the summer, and autumn was turning into winter. In the freezing cell, emaciated and weak, my master was a bag of skin and bones, but he continued his intense meditation. One day in mid-November he was going over a passage in the fifteenth chapter, Yujuppon, of the Lotus Sutra: ". . . All these bodhisattvas, hearing the voice of Shakyamuni Buddha preaching, sprang forth from below. Each one of these bodhisattvas was the commander of a great host, leading a retinue as numerous as the sands in sixty thousand Ganges Rivers; moreover, others led retinues as numerous as the sands in fifty thousand, forty thousand, thirty thousand, twenty thousand, ten thousand Ganges; moreover....

Before he knew what had happened, he was floating in the air. He found himself among a multitude, his palms joined together, praying to the magnificent Dai-Gohonzon. He clearly witnessed the solemn ceremony which revealed the eternity of life, and he himself was a participant. In the light of the morning sun streaming through the window into the small,

wretched cell, he sat stupefied with utmost joy, oblivious of the hot tears rolling down his cheeks. "I am a Bodhisattva of the Earth!" No words could have expressed the profound and intense joy he experienced then. He had awakened to his mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth. "Now I know the objective of my life," he thought resolutely to himself. "I will never forget this day. I will dedicate the rest of my life to propagating the Supreme Law."

About the same time, Mr. Toda's master, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, breathed his last in another cell in the same prison. He was seventy-three. In spite of his advanced age, Mr. Makiguchi had never ceased fighting the suppression by the military authorities, never yielding an inch. Finally, on November 18, 1944, he died a martyr to his belief. Mr. Makiguchi died at the same time that Mr. Toda awakened to his lifelong mission.

In some cases the awakening is called the second president Toda's enlightenment. It means, however, that he attained a great awakening to his mission as Nichiren Daishonin's disciple. The prewar Soka Gakkai could also conceive of some movement for kosen-rufu, but its awakening to the mission of kosen-rufu was so weak that it collapsed in the face of suppression by the military authorities. Visualizing the Gohonzon in the most severe circumstances of prison, Mr. Toda chanted daimoku and awakened to his mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth. With joy, gratitude and realization, he cried out from prison for the attainment of kosen-rufu. Herein lies the profound significance of his declaration. His awakening was a single-minded devotion to kosen-rufu, which would never waver in any of the storms of life. Whatever the case, this was the starting point for the Soka Gakkai's remarkable development as the organization for the propagation of true Buddhism.

In his essay, "The History and Conviction of the Soka Gakkai," my master wrote: "About the time of Mr. Makiguchi's death the number of my daimoku was approaching two million. It was then, with the mercy of the original Buddha, that I experienced a mystic state of life. From that time on I spent every day being interrogated and chanting daimoku, overjoyed that now I could understand the Lotus Sutra, whereas I had been unable to before."

It was this single, decisive moment which destined the Soka Gakkai to become the center of a multitude of bodhisattvas who would spring forth, filled with energy and potential, one after another. Mr. Toda was then forty-five. Confucius once said, "At the age of forty I was free of delusion. At the age of fifty I knew heaven's will." My master exclaimed, "It took me five years longer to dispel my delusion, but five years shorter to know heaven's will." Mr. Toda's awakening to his mission was what destined the Soka Gakkai to become the great organization of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

In the following year, standing among the ruins of war-ravaged Tokyo, Mr. Toda took his first step in the reconstruction of the Soka Gakkai. His master had left the prison in death; the disciple left it alive. Life and death-these are the mysterious workings of life essence. President Toda's heart must have been filled with a thousand emotions, but the profundity and abundance of those feelings became the source for the growth which the Soka Gakkai has now achieved. On July 3, 1945, the day he was released from prison, the single disciple, Josei Toda, firmly pledged to his master, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi: "Our lives are really eternal, without beginning or end. I now know that we were born in this world with the great mission of spreading the seven-character Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. What are we, then? In the final analysis, we are bodhisattvas of the essential teaching, Bodhisattvas of the Earth."

Mr. Toda's awakening that he, and his master, were Bodhisattvas of the Earth gradually found its way into the lives of individual Soka Gakkai members until they, too, awakened to the fact that they were also. However, it had not yet caused the rebirth of the organization as a whole. It was not until May 3, 1951, when Mr. Toda was inaugurated as second president, that the great awakening spread through the whole Soka Gakkai. The declaration he made in his inaugural speech was what became the core principle of the organization:

From a superficial understanding or from our outward appearance, we are Bodhisattvas of the Earth. However, from the inner viewpoint of our faith, we are kindred souls and disciples of Nichiren Daishonin. Whether we stand in the presence of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas or in the depths of hell, we chant the Lotus Sutra of seven characters to the Dai-Gohonzon and have one thing we can be proud of --- the Dai-Gohonzon within our hearts.

With that declaration Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai's march began, carrying it toward its subsequent development, a growth that has been unprecedented in the annals of Buddhism.

Life-to-Life Communication

The Lotus Sutra says that Bodhisattva Jogyo should now appear to propagate this teaching in the Latter Day of the Law, but has this actually happened? Whether or not Bodhisattva Jogyo has already appeared in this world, Nichiren has at least made a start in propagating this teaching.

Nichiren Daishonin knew that outwardly his behavior and practice were those of the incarnation of Bodhisattva Jogyo. However, his inner enlightenment and his ultimate identity were those of the original Buddha. In the majority of his writings he speaks in a very roundabout way even of his outward appearance as Bodhisattva Jogyo. He says that he was "the first to propagate," "the first to spread," and so on, without specifically identifying himself as Bodhisattva Jogyo. According to the Lotus Sutra, the multitude of bodhisattvas of the essential teaching, who sprang forth from the earth, were so magnificent in appearance that they even eclipsed the Buddha, who was preaching the essential teaching. Among them, the leader, Bodhisattva Jogyo, looked the most dignified of all. The Daishonin, in contrast, looked no better than a common priest. If he had claimed to be Jogyo, the people might have become unnecessarily suspicious and create the evil cause of slandering him. This probably made him avoid a straightforward statement.

However, "Nichiren has at least made a start in propagating this teaching" clearly states that he is Bodhisattva Jogyo himself. Consider the purposes for which Shakyamuni expounded the Lotus Sutra. One of them was to summon the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching from underneath the earth and entrust them with propagation in the Latter Day after his passing. Therefore, as soon as the transfer was completed with the Jinriki and Zokurui chapters, all the Buddhas returned to their respective lands, the Treasure Tower vanished, and the solemn assembly returned from the air to Eagle Peak.

Thus we are made to understand the extent Shakyamuni went to in order to entrust the Law to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, especially to their leader, Jogyo. In the Latter Day, Nichiren Daishonin was spreading the Law which Jogyo should propagate. If the Daishonin were not Jogyo but some other person, then the ceremony of the Lotus Sutra would have been entirely meaningless. The appearance of Taho Buddha and all the other Buddhas throughout the universe would have lost its significance. First, that is impossible. Neither would the Daishonin have allowed such a situation. It is evident, therefore, that outwardly he was acting as Bodhisattva Jogyo but his inner enlightenment was that of the Buddha who established a Law powerful enough to illuminate darkness on into eternity.

Be resolved to summon forth the great power of your faith, and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the prayer that your faith will be steadfast and correct at the moment of your death. Never seek any other way to inherit the ultimate law and manifest it in your life. Only then will you realize that earthly desires are enlightenment and the sufferings of life and death are nirvana. Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra.

I am always ready to clear up any further questions you may have.

"Be resolved" indicates the tremendous importance of the guidance which follows. At that time Sairenbo found himself in the worst hardship imaginable, at a crucial juncture which would determine whether he would attain enlightenment or not. The phrase "be resolved" carries with it the Daishonin's fervent wish for him to somehow inherit true Buddhism's lifeblood. The heritage of the ultimate law flows only in the lives of those who summon forth the great power of their faith and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. "Summon forth the great power of your faith" is the way the Daishonin, with his entire being, encouraged the faith of this one person.

For faith to "be steadfast and correct at the moment of your death," you must have an undisturbed faith in the Mystic Law at that final moment, feel the greatest joy to have been able to embrace the Law, and end your life with the deepest satisfaction that you have nothing whatsoever to regret. Therefore, the passage as a whole urges us to pray sincerely now, while we are alive, so that everything within us centers completely on Nam-myoho-renge-kyo at the moment of our death. It also teaches us to pray with the awareness that each moment is the last moment of our life.

When we pray with such awareness, the Mystic Law will well forth from the depths of our life and merge with the Mystic Law pervading the entire universe. In this bond the ultimate law flows ceaselessly. I want you to know that there is no other way to inherit and manifest the ultimate law in your life. Only then can you, even though common mortals, be able to reveal yourselves as entities of the Mystic Law who transform earthly desires into enlightenment and change the sufferings of life and death into nirvana.

The heritage of Buddhism flows within the faith of individuals --- the belief of those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the prayer that their faith will be firm and true at the moment of their death. In Buddhism the Law is the foundation of everything. However, the Law cannot produce any value by itself. There must be people who embrace the Law and make the truth it contains part of their lives. It takes people to discover the Law, and people to convey it to others. That is why the emphasis in Buddhism on how to transmit the Law from one person to another is so strong, and that is why people are given the highest value.

Hyaku-rokka Sho (The One Hundred and Six Comparisons) states, "The Law does not spread by itself; because people propagate it, both the people and the Law are worthy of respect." On Taking Faith in the Lotus Sutra reads, "All the teachings of the Buddha are propagated by people. Hence T'ien-t'ai's statement, 'A person represented the Law even during the Buddha's lifetime. How, then, is it possible in the Latter Day for the Law to be worthy of respect if the person who spreads it is not?' If the Law is supreme, so is the person who embraces it. To slander that person, therefore, is to slander the Law." Here we can see the great value the Daishonin attached to people, as individuals and together.

Only one life can activate another life. The spirit of Buddhism flows in life-to-life communication, in the course of mutual help and guidance among or between people. Earlier we studied the phrase, "Thus I heard," in The True Entity of Life.* "I" in the phrase is Ananda, one of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples who listened to more of his master's teachings than any other disciple. In another sense, "I" denotes life. Otherwise, T'ien-t'ai would not have stated that "I heard" indicates a person who upholds the True Law. "I heard" in no way signifies the simple act of listening with one's ears. It means to accept, believe and practice the Buddha's teaching with one's entire being.

Faith's Lifeblood

In conclusion, I would like to briefly retrace the development of this Goshō to see how painstakingly the Daishonin expounded the true heritage of the lifeblood to Sairenbo. Nichiren Daishonin states at the beginning, "To reply, the ultimate law of life and death as transmitted from the Buddha to all living beings is Myoho-renge-kyo. The five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo were transferred from the two Buddhas inside the Treasure Tower, Shakyamuni and Taho, to Bodhisattva Jogyo, carrying on a heritage unbroken since the infinite past." Here he declares conclusively that the Law --- the Gohonzon --- is itself the heritage of the ultimate law.

This is the Law which flows in the depths of the people's lives. Those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are themselves the living heritage of the ultimate law. The Daishonin declares this in the statement, "Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment countless aeons ago, the Lotus Sutra which leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from each other. Therefore, to chant Myoho-renge-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate law of life and death."

In terms of time, the lifeblood --- the mystic relationship between the Law and the lives of the people --- continues eternally throughout past, present and future. "The heritage of the Lotus Sutra flows within the lives of those who never forsake it in any lifetime whatsoever --- whether in the past, the present or the future." In terms of space, the heritage of the ultimate law flows within the lives of the Daishonin's disciples who, in perfect unity, chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and advance together toward kosen-rufu. He says, "All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with one mind (itai doshin), transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate law of life and death."

In a word, the heritage of the ultimate law flows forever within the people's lives, from the infinite past to the eternal future. It lives vibrantly in the fusion between the Law --- the Gohonzon --- and the people's lives, and in the mutual recognition and encouragement of those who uphold the Law. Thus the lifeblood of Buddhism is always focused on the people, and this is the heart of Nichiren Daishonin's very being and of Buddhism for the people. It embodies a depth of compassion, therefore, which only the original Buddha could bring into being. I believe that no one, before or since, has taught anything greater.

However, whether we can inherit the lifeblood of the Daishonin's Buddhism or not depends entirely on our faith. This is why he warns us in the Goshō's conclusion: "Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra." Everything depends on faith. Without faith, the heritage of the ultimate law, which was taught in such length from four viewpoints as outlined earlier, would prove to be totally false. On the other hand, with faith, everything the Daishonin says can be achieved. "Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra." We cannot attain true enlightenment by the Law --- the Lotus Sutra --- alone. We must have the lifeblood of faith, faith which is directly handed down from the Daishonin, who knew the Lotus Sutra with his entire being and manifested the oneness of the Person and the Law. Without this faith, which establishes the living connection between the Person and the Law, it is useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra. The sentence, "Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless. . . ," also tells us that only through faith can we bring forth the Gohonzon's powers of Buddha and Law.

The Japanese title of The True Object of Worship is Kanjin no Honzon Sho, which means "the object of worship for attaining Buddhahood." The twenty-sixth High Priest, Nichikan Shonin, put particular emphasis on the phrase, "for attaining Buddhahood." According to the records of his lecture on this subject written by his disciples, he stated, "Engrave this phrase in your hearts as a will from me." Why did Nichikan Shonin go so far as to say that it was his will? This is because to embrace the Gohonzon is itself to attain Buddhahood, and therefore the most important practice of all. What Nichikan Shonin wanted to convey was that embracing the Gohonzon is faith. "The object of worship for attaining Buddhahood" can also be called "the object of worship for continuing one's faith."

A well-known passage in The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon goes, "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-enge-kyo.... The Gohonzon is found in faith alone." This is the Daishonin's declaration that the Gohonzon is contained only in faith. In his Exegesis on The True Object of Worship, Nichikan Shonin states, "If we believe and embrace this Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, our flesh and blood is the Gohonzon of ichinen sanzen the life of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin." He concludes by saying, "Therefore, aspire solely to the power of the Buddha and the power of the Law, and devote yourselves to faith and practice. Do not pass your entire life in idleness and regret it for all eternity."

Thus, the sentence, "Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra," is a stern reminder. Without faith and practice, we can bring forth neither the power of the Buddha nor the power of the Law, let alone manifest the object of worship of ichinen sanzen within ourselves. Everything boils down to the fact that the heritage is faith itself.

The ninth High Priest, Nichiu Shonin, speaks on the heritage of faith in his Kegi Sho (On the Formalities of Nichiren Shoshu):

Faith, heritage and the water of the Law are [ultimately] one and the same.... If we do not depart from the faith upheld since Nichiren Daishonin's day, our mind and body will become Myoho-enge-kyo itself. If we act contrary to it, our mind and body will remain those of an ordinary person. If we remain so, it is impossible to receive the lifeblood which enables us to attain Buddhahood in the flesh.

In his Commentary on the Kegi Sho, the fifty-ninth High Priest, Nichiko Hori, explains the above passage as follows:

In the final analysis, faith, heritage and the water of the Law are one and the same. Through faith the believer receives the water of the Law from the original Buddha. The water of the Law thus received flows within the believer's life, just as blood circulates within the human

body. For this reason, to convey the water of the Law through faith is to transmit the heritage. Therefore, faith should never be disturbed or shaken. If it is disturbed, the water of the Law will cease to flow. Or, even if it continues to run, it will become defiled and irregular, thus cutting off the flow of Buddhism itself. As long as faith remains unshaken, the pure and immaculate heritage of Buddhism will continue to flow with vigor, no matter how many ages may pass.

Nichiko Shonin solemnly states:

Ours is the faith which has been upheld since the day of the supreme teacher of Buddhism, Nichiren Daishonin, and the founder of the Head Temple, Nikko Shonin. Although we are disciples far removed from their time, if we follow this faith truly, our defiled minds and bodies are purified, becoming the mind and body of Myoho-enge-kyo. The two essentials of pure faith and devoted practice change our entire being. If we ignore these two and disobey the Buddha's will by following heretical or blind belief, the river of the Law will become blocked, and we will be pushed back, in mind and body, to the state of benightedness that we were in before. We will lose our right to the lifeblood which enables us to attain Buddhahood in the flesh. How pitiful that would be!

As is clear from this, the lifeblood of faith is transmitted only within the faith which has been upheld since the day of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin. Herein lies the vital position of the successive high priests, as the envoy of the original Buddha, who have inherited the ultimate law of life. As Nichiko Shonin stated, "the pure and immaculate heritage of Buddhism will continue to flow with vigor," the sacred life of Nichiren Daishonin flows through the lives of us, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, as long as we maintain the correct faith and carry out activities for kosen-rufu, the goal given by Nichiren Daishonin. If we lose sight of this goal, not only will the Daishonin's Buddhism be reduced to formalism, but his teachings will prove to be false.

In any event, the Gohonzon is the fundamental object of worship, the basis of everything. If one forgets that and gives more veneration to something or someone else, he is committing serious slander. It is impossible to bring the powers of Buddha and the Law forth from the Gohonzon without the lifeblood of faith. In President Toda's day there were members who overly prided themselves on having received the Gohonzon. Mr. Toda would say to them, "Without faith it is but a useless treasure.... You must try very hard to bind your faith directly to the Gohonzon. Otherwise you will only invite great misery." Just as he had warned, quite a few of those members were later very sorry that they had not had stronger faith.

Nichiko Shonin implies that we should learn about faith through the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin. We of the Soka Gakkai study the Daishonin's Goshō, engrave Nikko Shonin's Twenty-six Precepts in our hearts, and work to attain kosen-rufu under the guidance of the High Priest, never begrudging even our lives. Only within such faith can the lifeblood of the original Buddha flow strongly.

The Original Buddha's Conviction

With my deep respect,
Nichiren, the Shramana of Japan

The eleventh day of the second month in the ninth year of Bun'ei (1272)

I want to say a few words about the date on which the Daishonin wrote this Goshō. On the same day, as if by coincidence, internal strife broke out. He had predicted this and warned the government about it in [Rissho Ankoku Ron](#) (The Security of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism) in 1260, and again during the Tatsunokuchi Persecution on September 12, 1271. The prophecy came true, as the Daishonin states in the Letter from Sado written on March 20 the same year:

Now, twenty-six years since the battle of Hoji, the Kamakura government is again plagued by internal strife. Rebellions have already broken out twice on the eleventh and the seventeenth day of the second month of this year.... The current rebellion is what the Yakushi Sutra means by "the disaster of internal strife." The Ninno Sutra states, "When the sage departs, the seven types of calamity will invariably arise.".... Nichiren is the pillar, sun, moon, mirror and eyes of the ruling clan of Kanto. On the twelfth day of the ninth month of last year when I was

arrested, I boldly declared that if the country should lose Nichiren, the seven disasters would occur without fail. Didn't this prophecy come true just sixty and then one hundred fifty days later?

The rebellion was engineered by Hojo Tokisuke against his half-brother, Regent Hojo Tokimune. Tokisuke headed the Rokuhara government in Kyoto, an agency of the Kamakura shogunate. He attempted to usurp the regency from his brother, but Tokimune discovered the plot before-hand. Taking the initiative, the regent sent troops and killed Noritoki, Morinao and the other suspected plotters. Mortal combat continued between the members of the same clan until Tokisuke's faction was totally annihilated. The incident is called the February Disturbance.

The Daishonin had sensed that internal strife was imminent about a month before the incident. Immediately after the Tsukahara Debate on January 16, he pointed this out to Honma Rokurozaemon and warned him about it. Therefore the Daishonin, while writing this Goshō, must have had a premonition that the whole country was being jolted by the terrible strife. Nevertheless, looking out over the future, he calmly wrote this Goshō in order to leave his heritage for the perpetuation of the Law. His deed also demonstrates that the more agitated the world is, the more important it becomes to establish an unshakable foundation.

Shramana is a Sanskrit word meaning a humble seeker of the Way or one who masters the true law and denounces evil laws. Thus, it means a person who leaves his family to practice Buddhism. When the Daishonin wrote *The True Object of Worship* in April 1273, he signed it, "Nichiren, the Shramana of this country." At the end of *On the Buddha's Prophecy*, written in intercalary May 1273, he wrote, "Written by Nichiren, the Shramana of Japan."

"The Shramana of this country" stands in contrast to "Shramana of T'ien-t'ai," which the monks of the Tendai sect in Japan called themselves. It expresses the Daishonin's conviction and indicates that Japan was the country in which the original Buddha made his advent to save mankind for all eternity. The original Buddha was Nichiren Daishonin himself, for he mastered the Law of supreme righteousness in the Latter Day, and dedicated himself to refuting all evil laws. The Shramana of Japan, as he called himself, is synonymous with the Buddha of the Latter Day, as he states in the *Ongi Kuden*, "The Buddha of the Latter Day is the common mortal, the common priest.... He is called a Buddha, and he is called a common priest."

I close here. But my eternal friends, have faith and know that what our organization is doing, each hour, each day, each decade, and the activities of all members toward the goal of kosen-rufu are together the heritage of the ultimate law of life and death. Always with this conviction, let us move forward together along the path of faith toward the glorious twenty-first century.