

August 2020 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 50–59

“THE BUDDHISM OF THE SUN: ILLUMINATING THE WORLD” [55]

TOWARD A CENTURY OF HEALTH: THE WISDOM FOR LEADING A LONG LIFE OF GOOD FORTUNE AND BENEFIT

PART 3

ACCUMULATING TREASURES OF THE HEART—WISELY CREATING VALUE EACH DAY

POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND REGARDING BUDDHIST STUDY IN THE SGI

1. Our understanding of Nichiren Buddhism has deepened significantly since the 1991 priesthood issue—culminating in doctrinal clarifications in 2014. What Nichiren Shoshu teaches is completely different from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, the foundation of SGI study.
2. SGI is a “living” religion with a “living” philosophy, meaning that the application of the core, unchanging principles of Buddhism is always adapting to changing times and circumstances.
3. Even for longtime members, it is important to continue studying current materials. Our mentor’s explanations of Nichiren’s writings in his monthly lectures represent this “living” Buddhism.


GOALS FOR PRESENTERS


1. Let’s learn together: This is the recommended approach for presenting President Ikeda’s lectures. Rather than lecturing on his lectures, the goal of the monthly presentations is to study the material together with fellow members. With this in mind, presenters should aim to read the material several times and share 2 or 3 key points that inspire them, rather than attempting to cover every point.
2. Let’s unite with the heart of our mentor: Sensei strives to encourage members through his lectures, just as Nichiren did through his writings. Let’s strive to convey this spirit as we study with fellow members and apply these teachings in our daily lives, efforts in society and advancement of kosen-rufu.


BASIC POINTS FOR PRESENTING “THE BUDDHISM OF THE SUN” LECTURES


- ⇒ Read the full lecture several times.
- ⇒ Read the footnotes, as they often provide additional background information. (LB, p. 59)
- ⇒ Chant abundant daimoku before your presentation to grasp and convey Sensei’s heart.
- ⇒ During the presentation, have someone read aloud key Goshō excerpts and your selected passages from the lecture. Ensure the reader has the opportunity to prepare well ahead of time.
- ⇒ Encourage participants to also read the lecture and find their own points of inspiration.


ADDITIONAL RESOURCES


 Soka Gakkai Establishment Day (LB, 51–52)
 ○ *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 23,
 pp. 256–60


 Faith for Health and Long Life (LB, 55)
 ○ *The Five Eternal Guidelines of the Soka Gakkai*,
 pp. 49–64


 Selfless Devotion to the Law (LB, 51–52)
 ○ Nov 2002 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 31–40
 <PDF attached>

 Treasures of the Heart (LB, 56)
 ○ Teachings for Victory, vol. 3, pp. 86–89

 Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda’s
 Awakening in Prison (LB, 53)
 ○ *The Human Revolution*, vol. 4, “Garden of Life”
 chapter (entire chapter)

 Four Sufferings Into Four Virtues (LB, 56–58)
 ○ Sept 2004 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 34–39
 <PDF attached>

 Happiness: “Enjoying Themselves at Ease”
 (LB, 54–55)
 ○ *The Five Eternal Guidelines of the Soka Gakkai*,
 pp. 19–24

 The Benefit of Chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo
 One Time (LB, 57–58)
 ○ *Discussions on Youth, New Edition*, pp. 220–22
 ○ Excerpt from March 24, 1997, Youth Leaders
 Meeting Address
 <PDF attached>

The **WORLD** of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings

A DISCUSSION ON HUMANISTIC RELIGION *[26] Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death*

Living Long and Healthy for Kosen-rufu

This is an ongoing discussion on the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, the founder of the Buddhism practiced by the Soka Gakkai International. SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Soka Gakkai Study Department Leader Katsuji Saito, and Study Department Vice Leader Masaaki Morinaka participate in these discussions.

President Ikeda states: "The Daishonin's writings are a record of his intense struggles over the course of his lifetime. To fulfill his mission, he endured great persecution and left behind a monumental teaching. The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin crystallizes his spirit, action and instruction. We should therefore read it as the scripture for the Latter Day of the Law."

KATSUJI SAITO: In this and the following installment, we will focus on Nichiren Daishonin's conduct in his later years.

DAISAKU IKEDA: As the votary of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin wholeheartedly and unwaveringly devoted his entire life to opening the path to enlightenment for all people of the Latter Day of the Law. How did this infinitely noble champion of the Law view the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death in the context of his own life? What kind of guidance did he give his followers on this subject? How did he himself meet death? Let's discuss these and other issues. Birth, aging, sickness, and

death represent subjects of paramount importance for all humankind.

MASAAMI MORINAKA: As reflected in the story of Shakyamuni's four meetings, it would be no exaggeration to say that Buddhism arose from the desire to explain the fundamental sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

Birth, Aging, Sickness, and Death Are the Realities of Human Life

IKEDA: Nichiren Daishonin says: "First learn about death, and then learn about other matters" (GZ, 1404).



K E Y P O I N T S

>> Everything Is in Constant Flux

"In a sense, all phenomena in the universe are impermanent. Everything is in constant flux. The entire universe is governed by the inexorable rhythm of birth, abiding, change, and extinction. Similarly, birth, aging, sickness, and death are woven into the very fabric of our existence." (p.35)

>> The Overriding Power of Compassion

"Here we see Nichiren Daishonin offering wholehearted words of guidance to enable his seriously ill disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu to repel the devilish functions of illness and death that were attacking him. The fact that he summoned the energy to write this letter despite his own debilitating illness attests to the overriding power of his compassion." (p.36)

>> Buddhas Naturally Face Obstacles

"The notion that attaining enlightenment means that one will forever be free of obstacles and negative functions is not Buddhism. Rather, the Buddha's immense state of life provides the inner strength and power to fearlessly confront such onslaughts and bring forth the necessary wisdom and action to triumph over them." (p.37)

>> An Expression of Genuine Caring

"illness is just one aspect of human life. You cannot conclude that people let themselves be defeated simply because they have fallen ill. Moreover, to jump to the conclusion that people don't have correct faith simply because they became sick would be utterly lacking in compassion. Offering heartfelt encouragement to those who are battling illness is an expression of genuine caring." (p.37)

>> Live a Balanced Life

"The ultimate purpose for living long and healthy lives is so that we can benefit others through our compassionate actions. Of course, it is only natural that we pray for good health and longevity for our own happiness as well. Needless to say, to ruin one's health on account of immoderate habits, an unbalanced lifestyle, or plain negligence runs entirely counter to a way of life of value creation." (p.39)

Indeed, Shakyamuni's prime motivation in leaving his home to pursue a religious life was to find answers to the questions of life and death. Without an explanation for the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death, the goals of genuine human happiness and prosperity will forever remain out of reach. Despite this being a matter of fundamental importance, however, many people avoid looking directly at these realities of the human condition.

MORINAKA: The Daishonin writes: "Having received life, one cannot escape death. Yet though everyone, from the noblest, the emperor, on down to the lowliest commoner, recognizes this as a fact, not even one person in a thousand or ten thousand truly takes the matter seriously or grieves over it" (WND, 99).

IKEDA: Birth, aging, sickness, and death are the reality of human life. It is impossible to escape this reality and trying to do so will not lead us to true happiness.

SAITO: One reason I feel that people dislike looking squarely at this inevitable reality of human existence is that it brings them face to face with life's impermanence.

IKEDA: In a sense, all phenomena in the universe are impermanent. Everything is in constant flux. The entire universe is governed by the inexorable rhythm of birth, abiding, change, and extinction.¹ Similarly, birth, aging, sickness, and death are woven into the very fabric of our existence.

Those who take their lives for granted are secretly afraid of death. Those who take their youth for granted dread the thought of growing old. Those who take their health for granted are stunned when they fall ill. The four sufferings of human existence cannot be avoided.

But for a Buddha—for someone who has awakened to the Mystic Law and perceived the eternity of life—birth, aging, sickness, and death constitute a fundamental rhythm; they are imbued with the fragrance of the four noble virtues of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity.² The cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death of ordinary people who embrace the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and who thoroughly dedicate themselves to the Mystic Law are also imbued with the fragrance of these four virtues. This is what the Daishonin tells us.³

To better understand this principle, let's see what the Daishonin specifically says about the four sufferings in terms of his own life. In "On the Building of Hachiman Shrine," which he wrote in 1281, the year prior to his death, the Daishonin describes the state of his health.



In our own lives, summoning the strong faith to battle obstacles, such as the devil of illness, without either fearing them or underestimating them, corresponds to manifesting the state of Buddhahood.



Eric Wells

MORINAKA: Yes, he writes: “I have been preaching this doctrine [of the Mystic Law] now for twenty-nine years. Perhaps as a result of physical exhaustion and mental exertion owing to daily debates, monthly persecutions, and two exiles, during the last seven or eight years [here at Minobu] illnesses associated with aging have assailed me yearly. None of them led to a crisis, but from the first month of this year my body has especially weakened and I have the feeling that my life is drawing to a close. Besides, I am already a full sixty years old.⁴ Even if I were to manage to live past this year, is it likely that I could live for one or two more years?” (GZ, 1105).

SAITO: He clearly foresaw the time of his death.

IKEDA: Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, too, in the year before he died, predicted that his life would end around the time the cherry trees were in bloom. That was in fact when he died. President Toda did not avert his gaze from the reality of birth, aging, sickness, and death in his life.

MORINAKA: The issues of life and death are extremely difficult to ponder. Yet I think that we must all strive to develop an attitude toward life that enables us to look squarely at the reality of birth, aging, sickness, and death.

IKEDA: During the twenty-one years from the time he established his teaching at age 32 until he went to live at Minobu at 53, Nichiren Daishonin overcame persecutions as great, in his words, as “mountains piled upon mountains and waves following upon waves” (WND, 241). It is evident from his writings that enduring each of these persecutions entailed enormous challenges, both physical and mental.

In particular, when he was exiled to Sado Island at age 50, the Daishonin was forced to live in extremely harsh conditions. This may have been why his health was less than robust when he went to live at Minobu, and he was subsequently plagued by illness throughout his stay there. In the passage you just read, the Daishonin speaks of suffering from “illnesses associated with aging” (GZ, 1105).

Elsewhere he explains that he was suffering from “emaciating sickness” or “old age.”⁵

SAITO: The Daishonin also specifically writes that he experienced a severe bout of diarrhea on December 30, 1277.⁶ In early June of the following year, 1278, his symptoms worsened. Fortunately, a treatment prescribed by Shijo Kingo seems to have helped him recover.

Three years later, in early 1281, the Daishonin, at age 60, again became seriously ill. It appears that by late November his condition had deteriorated until he was scarcely able to eat.⁷

MORINAKA: In one letter, the Daishonin mentions that there was a severe shortage of salt at Minobu.⁸ In light of this, it may be that a mineral deficiency contributed to the prolonging of his illness.

IKEDA: While it seems that he recovered somewhat by January 1282, the year he died, in February his condition again took a turn for the worse, and he could no longer write even short letters by his own hand, dictating them to his disciples instead.

In the midst of this, on February 28, Nichiren Daishonin wrote a letter titled “The Proof of the Lotus Sutra” (WND, 1108–09), which he had Nikko Shonin deliver. Here we see the Daishonin offering wholehearted words of guidance to enable his seriously ill disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu to repel the devilish functions of illness and death that were attacking him. The fact that he summoned the energy to write this letter despite his own debilitating illness attests to the overriding power of his compassion.

It seems that the Daishonin’s health continued to fluctuate throughout the last year of his life, right up until his

departure from Minobu in September.⁹ Because there are so few letters to his followers written in his own hand in 1282 — his only extant writings consist of a few short New Year's messages and other letters, including "The Proof of the Lotus Sutra" — we can surmise that the Daishonin was in extremely frail physical health.

"Nam-myoho-renge-kyo Is like the Roar of a Lion"

SAITO: Leaving a more detailed discussion of the Daishonin's final days for the next installment, allow me to say that from his writings we can clearly discern that the Daishonin's attitude toward aging, sickness, and death was entirely free of the resignation or melancholy that people often experience as they approach the end of their lives. His frank and unembellished words also convey his very real pain and suffering. But the dominant impression we are left with is the Daishonin's serene and unperturbed state of life, unclouded by despair or futility.

MORINAKA: In light of his spiritual fortitude, we may fairly conclude that the Daishonin had fully come to terms with the reality of old age. Also, even when he became ill on account of physical decline or the harsh environment at Minobu, he never lost his fighting spirit.

IKEDA: The Lotus Sutra states that the Buddha has "few ills and few worries" (LS15, 214). What this tells us is that even those who become Buddhas will still have worries and sufferings. They will also naturally be subject to illness. In addition, precisely because they are dedicated to truth and justice, they are bound to be assailed by all kinds of obstacles and devilish functions.

The notion that attaining enlightenment means that one will forever be free of obstacles and negative functions is not Buddhism. Rather, the Buddha's immense state of life provides the inner strength and power to fearlessly confront such onslaughts and bring forth the necessary wisdom and action to triumph over them.

In our own lives, summoning the strong faith to battle obstacles, such as the devil of illness, without either fearing them or underestimating them, corresponds to manifesting the state of Buddhahood.

MORINAKA: So, to reiterate, just because we practice Buddhism, that doesn't mean we will never become ill.

IKEDA: President Toda would often say: "Illness is a function of nature. At the same time, human beings possess within them the power to cure their own illness. This is like when we surmount a steep slope and come down

again to level ground."

The Daishonin says: "The true aspect of the threefold world is birth, aging, sickness, and death" (GZ, 753).

Illness is just one aspect of human life. You cannot conclude that people let themselves be defeated simply because they have fallen ill. Moreover, to jump to the conclusion that people don't have correct faith simply because they became sick would be utterly lacking in compassion. Offering heartfelt encouragement to those who are battling illness is an expression of genuine caring. When any of his followers fell ill, the Daishonin would encourage them with all his heart and soul.

The "lion's roar" of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the ultimate weapon for battling illness. We absolutely must never forget the Daishonin's statement: "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?" (WND, 412).

SAITO: In his dialogue with you, President Ikeda, the noted Montreal University professor and bioethicist Dr. Guy Bourgeault remarked that health is neither the absence of illness nor merely a stable condition. He said, "Essentially good health is less the absence of illness than the tension between a precarious equilibrium and the constant dynamic of its re-establishment."¹⁰

MORINAKA: It is certainly true that even when we are healthy, a ceaseless battle is being waged in our bodies against disease-causing viruses and bacteria. In that regard, the absence of this struggle signifies the death of a living organism.

IKEDA: To use the struggle against illness to develop an even greater sense of inner fulfillment and richness is the way of life of value-creation. That is why it is so important that we have the "heart of a lion king" with which to fight through to the end against all obstacles. We must possess an indomitable and undefeatable spirit. It is for this very reason that we need to exert ourselves in the two ways of faith and practice each day, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for both ourselves and others, and forge a strong determination grounded in faith that will remain steadfast and unwavering in the face of any attack by the devil of illness.

When the lay nun Toki, the wife of Toki Jonin, became seriously ill, the Daishonin repeatedly sent her letters of encouragement, seeking to impart hope and strength.



The “lion’s roar” of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the ultimate weapon for battling illness. We absolutely must never forget the Daishonin’s statement: “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?”

The Will and Action to Battle Illness

MORINAKA: The lay nun Toki had for many years been looking after her ailing mother-in-law as well as supporting her husband in difficult circumstances. It seems that the stress finally proved too much and she lost her health. She also lacked the energy to actively seek treatment.

The Daishonin encourages her, saying: “You also are a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, and your faith is like the waxing moon or the rising tide. Be deeply convinced, then, that your illness cannot possibly persist, and that your life cannot fail to be extended! Take care of yourself, and do not burden your mind with grief” (WND, 656).

IKEDA: “Do not burden your mind with grief,” he says. The important thing is to possess a fighting spirit, to possess the spirit of a votary of the Lotus Sutra. He also says: “Take care of yourself.” It is vital that we take practical steps toward restoring our health.

No one intends to be defeated by illness from the outset. But should a particular illness interfere with our daily activities or our work, or cause us to lose our courage and self-confidence, we may gradually be overtaken by despair. In the case of the lay nun Toki, her sense of resignation may have stemmed from her sickness having dragged on for so long without any sign of improvement. The Daishonin urges her to summon the resolve to go on living despite any hardship.

MORINAKA: In “On Prolonging One’s Life Span,” the Daishonin writes: “Life is the most precious of all treasures. Even one extra day of life is worth more than ten million ryo¹¹ of gold. . . . So you must hasten to accumulate the treasure of faith and quickly conquer your illness. . . . One day of life is more valuable than all the treasures of the major world system, so first you must muster sincere faith. . . . Moreover you have encountered the Lotus Sutra. If you live even one day longer, you can accumulate that much more benefit. How truly precious your life is!” (WND, 955)

IKEDA: Of course, there are people who have strong faith but whose lives are short. There is definitely some pro-

found meaning behind this. The value of life is not determined by the number of years lived.

The Daishonin asserts: “It is better to live a single day with honor than to live to 120 and die in disgrace” (WND, 851).

In the passages you have cited, the Daishonin speaks of “the treasure of faith,” emphasizing to the lay nun Toki the importance of rousing the will — or, if you like, the sincere desire or aspiration — to go on living.

For us, each day of life is a day in which we can directly contribute to kosen-rufu; each day spent doing activities is a day that leads directly to the realization of the great wish for kosen-rufu. Therefore, we absolutely must not be defeated by any obstacle or illness. Only the devil king of the sixth heaven and his legions — the forces of darkness and negativity inherent in life — will rejoice if we let ourselves be defeated and fail to fulfill our mission for the sake of the Mystic Law.

MORINAKA: The drama of illness epitomizes the struggle between the Buddha and devilish functions, between attaining enlightenment or being stuck in the lower worlds.

To Acquire the Four Noble Virtues of Buddhahood

IKEDA: The Daishonin says that illness is “the Buddha’s design,” because it can spur one to arouse the “resolve to attain the way” (WND, 937).¹² Illness is indeed none other than a battle between the Buddha and devilish forces.

In “The Proof of the Lotus Sutra,” addressed to Nanjo Tokimitsu who was seriously ill, the Daishonin describes the determination and spirit needed to defeat such negative functions.

SAITO: He castigates the devils of illness attacking Tokimitsu, beginning his direct assault with the words, “You demons. . . !” (WND, 1109).

MORINAKA: The Daishonin tells his disciple: “Since you now appear certain to attain Buddhahood, perhaps the heavenly devil and evil spirits¹³ are using illness to try to intimidate you. . . . Never be even the least bit afraid” (WND, 1109). The Daishonin then severely rebukes the demons.

IKEDA: The Daishonin says that, in tormenting Tokimitsu, these demons are turning their backs on the Lotus Sutra and becoming the enemy of all Buddhas past, present, and future throughout the universe. He also says

that it is not enough for these demons merely to have a change of heart and cure Tokimitsu's illness; they must also actively work to protect Tokimitsu. In this we find a vital principle that clarifies the essence of good health.

The ultimate purpose for living long and healthy lives is so that we can benefit others through our compassionate actions. Of course, it is only natural that we pray for good health and longevity for our own happiness as well. Needless to say, to ruin one's health on account of immoderate habits, an unbalanced lifestyle, or plain negligence runs entirely counter to a way of life of value creation.

We have to exercise wisdom in our daily lives—for example, taking time to refresh ourselves, and resting if we become fatigued. Good health is something we have to secure for ourselves by acting with prudence and good sense. Health is the badge of honor of the wise.

What is the purpose of striving for good health and longevity? It is so that we can use our lives to the fullest to work for the sake of the Law, for the happiness and welfare of our families, our comrades, and our fellow human beings, and to accomplish our individual missions and realize the great wish for *kosen-rufu*.

It is vital therefore that we actively take on the challenges of birth, aging, sickness, and death amid our struggle for *kosen-rufu*. Doing so is actual proof of the eternal existence in our lives of the four noble virtues of Buddhahood—eternity, happiness, true self, and purity.

Birth, aging, sickness, and death are not causes for lamenting. Rather, they constitute the brilliant stage for enacting a life that resounds with the triumphant strains of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity. Through the drama of birth, aging, sickness, and death, we create a joyous life of human victory. ❁

To be continued.

1. Birth, abiding, change, and extinction: These are known as the four changing aspects of phenomena. They are also translated as “coming into existence, staying, changing, and perishing.”

2. Four virtues: Four noble qualities of the Buddha's life, also known as the four virtue paramitas—eternity, happiness, true self, and purity.

3. In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” the Daishonin says: “When we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo through birth, aging, sickness, and death, the fragrance of the four virtues is made to issue forth [from our lives]. Nam stands for the paramita of happiness, myoho for the



Eric Wells

paramita of true self, rengo for the paramita of purity, and kyo for the paramita of eternity” (GZ, 740).

4. According to the traditional Japanese way of counting.

5. The Daishonin writes: “During these past eight years, because of emaciating sickness and old age, I have year by year grown physically weaker while my mental powers too have waned” (GZ, 1583); and “I have also received several other letters from you but due to the ailments of old age and a poor appetite I have not yet made a reply. I apologize most humbly” (GZ, 993).

6. The Daishonin writes: “I developed diarrhea on the thirtieth day of the twelfth month of last year [1277], and up until the third or fourth day of the sixth month of this year, it grew more frequent by the day and more severe by the month” (WND, 920); and “I have had a bout of diarrhea since the thirtieth day of the twelfth month last year [1277], which failed to improve even by spring or summer this year. Fall passed, and around the tenth month it actually worsened. After that there was a slight improvement, but it is apt to start up again at any moment” (GZ, 1099).

7. The Daishonin writes: “Each day I grow weaker, and each night my condition seems worse. For the last ten days or more I have barely eaten” (GZ, 1583).

8. In a letter to Nanjo Tokimitsu dated September 1278, the Daishonin says: “In the seventh month, one sho of salt cost one hundred coins and we also traded one to of wheat for five go of salt. But now, there is no salt anywhere. What can we use to buy it? Our miso [fermented soybean paste] has also run out” (GZ, 1551). Note: To, sho, and go (Jpn.) are units of volume. To is equivalent to about 18 liters, sho to about 1.8 liters, and go to about 0.18 liters.

9. Nichiren Daishonin left Minobu on September 8. In the writing, “Arrival at Ikegami,” the nominal purpose of his trip is stated as a visit to the hot springs at Hitachi to recuperate (GZ, 1376). (The Hitachi mentioned in this passage is thought to be either Hitachi in present-day Ibaraki Prefecture or Hitachi in present-day Fukushima Prefecture.) Along the way, however, the Daishonin stopped at Ikegami (present-day Ota Ward, Tokyo) in Musashi Province, where he would give instruction to his followers for the last time. He passed away at Ikegami on October 13.

10. René Simard, Guy Bourgeault, and Daisaku Ikeda, *On Being Human* (Santa Monica, CA: Middleway Press, 2003), p. 52.

11. Ryo (Jpn.): A unit of weight understood to be equivalent to 37.5 grams.

12. The Daishonin writes: “And could not this illness of your husband's be the Buddha's design, because the Vimalakirti and Nirvana sutras both teach that sick people will surely attain Buddhahood? Illness gives rise to the resolve to attain the way” (WND, 937).

13. The word for evil spirits in the original Japanese passage is *gedo*, which literally means “out of the way” and usually indicates heretics and non-Buddhists. Here the word means something or someone that brings about disasters. Hence the expression “evil spirits.”



struggle as one with the mentor.

None of us believe from the start that we possess great power and ability. But when we gain courage from the mentor, the strength to take action and fight wells forth in our lives. We already possess that strength and ability within us. When we embrace the Mystic Law that is the lion king, that power and ability naturally well forth.

The Daishonin writes: “Suppose a lion has a hundred cubs. When the lion king sees its cubs attacked by other beasts or birds of prey, he roars; the hundred cubs will then feel emboldened, and the heads of those other beasts and birds of prey will be split in seven pieces” (WND, 949).

The practice of the hundred cubs, who represent the disciples, is to gain courage from the roar of the lion king, the mentor, and defeat other beasts and birds of prey that attack them.

SAITO: In other words, if the disciples only rely on the mentor to battle and defeat devilish forces without taking on the struggle themselves and emerging victorious, they cannot possibly carry on the mentor’s spirit.

“EXPOSE THE WRONGS OF POWERFUL ADVERSARIES, NEVER BEGRUDGING YOUR LIFE”

IKEDA: The Daishonin urges his followers to practice “just as Nichiren” (GZ, 1589) and to “spread the Lotus Sutra as he does” (WND, 994). Disciples who wait for the mentor to do something for them are disciples of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. True disciples of the Lotus Sutra are those who struggle just as the mentor does.

In a writing titled “Embudaichu Goshō” (On Jambudvīpa), the Daishonin states: “I pray that my followers will be cubs of the lion king and never incur the ridicule of packs of foxes. Strive to expose the wrongs of powerful adversaries, never begrudging your life, just as Nichiren.... It is rare indeed to meet

with such a lion” (GZ, 1589).

I have practiced in accord with these words. From that standpoint, I would like to present them to the members of the youth division who will inherit and carry on the Soka Gakkai’s legacy.

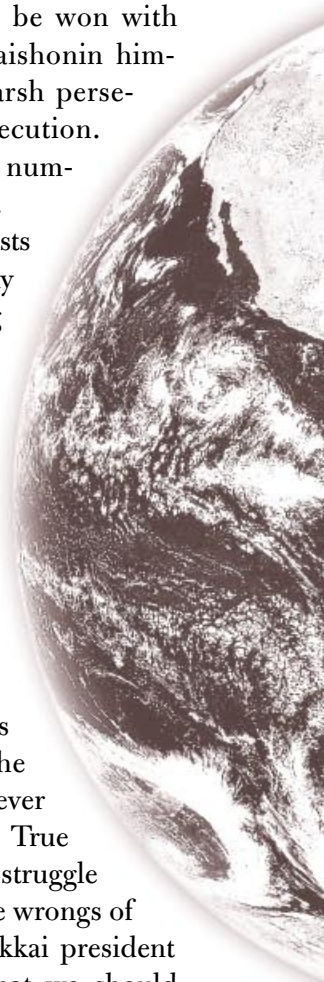
Kosen-rufu is a struggle against devilish forces. It is a struggle that cannot be won with halfhearted determination. The Daishonin himself was repeatedly subjected to harsh persecution, including exile and near execution. During the Atsuhara Persecution, a number of his followers were beheaded.

The world of Buddhahood manifests itself in our lives when we continuously struggle for kosen-rufu, summoning forth courage and challenging ourselves, and when our energy flags, summoning forth courage again and spurring ourselves on to further effort. Without the power of the world of Buddhahood, we cannot triumph over formidable adversaries.

Also, unless we strive with the spirit of not begrudging our lives, we cannot protect the interests of the people. Let us engrave in our hearts the passage, “Strive to expose the wrongs of powerful adversaries, never begrudging your life” (GZ, 1589). True victory cannot be achieved unless we struggle against devilish forces and expose the wrongs of powerful adversaries. First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi declared that we should actively seek to bring such devilish functions out into the open.

MORINAKA: Some people will wonder, however, why we should go out of our way to draw out devilish functions.

IKEDA: This is where a person with the life-state of a lion king is fundamentally different. Just because we can’t see these negative forces doesn’t mean they





Ardito de Luca/CORBIS

Hercules killed a fierce lion and wore its skin as his cloak and its head as his helmet.

don't exist. They are simply hidden. If we do not draw them out now and expose the wrongs of these powerful adversaries, people will ultimately be led astray by devilish forces. In his later years, Josei Toda also prayed for the three powerful enemies to quickly appear.

MORINAKA: Certainly, the leader of a campaign cannot achieve victory if he is cowardly and afraid, thinking, "What will I do if the enemy attacks?" A great leader faces the enemy squarely and launches a spirited counteroffensive.

IKEDA: This spirit is even more important for us, the protagonists of a momentous spiritual struggle. We must make our way with the dauntless state of life of a lion king. When the lion king moves, devilish func-

tions flee. When the time comes to protect the Buddhist Law, it is crucial that we resolutely drive devilish forces out into the open. We must never relax our guard. We must confront any adversary with all our strength and energy. Only then do we qualify as lions.

SAITO: The Daishonin writes: "Deploying weak soldiers in the first round of an attack only serves to increase the strength of a powerful adversary" (GZ, 37). In other words, if we underestimate our opponents and allow them to defeat us in the initial stages of a battle, they will grow more formidable.

IKEDA: That's right. Precisely because the struggle is a matter of such crucial importance, the lion king takes on each opponent with every ounce of his energy, even when those around him feel that he need not make such an all-out effort.

We must wage an offensive struggle, not a defensive one. As the lion king, Nichiren Daishonin himself incessantly attacked the root of slander and the one evil, which were the sources of people's suffering.

The same principle applies to us as individuals. If, for instance, when our negative karma strikes, we run away without challenging the situation with strong faith or seek to maneuver or strategize our way out of it, things will only become more complicated.

MORINAKA: I think we have all had bitter experiences on that account!

IKEDA: Courage and strong faith go hand in hand. Likewise, cowardice and doubt are connected on a fundamental level.

At the time of the Sado Exile, there were disciples who criticized their mentor, Nichiren Daishonin, saying that persecution would not have arisen if he had spread the teaching in a more peaceful way. Persecution caused them to doubt and even resent their mentor.

SAITO: But the mentor takes action with the awareness that persecution is inevitable.

IKEDA: It goes without saying that we mustn't invite antagonism or resentment as a result of actions that go against reason or common sense. Nevertheless, when we correctly spread the Law, obstacles will arise with-



out fail. In fact, if they don't, then we are not upholding the correct teaching. Though everyone may know this in principle, when persecution actually occurs, those without strong faith will discard their practice.

When the Daishonin witnessed this happening among his followers, he must have wondered why they would flee at such an important time when he had managed to expose the wrongs of powerful adversaries. Of those followers who criticized his stand, he writes: "They are being as ridiculous as fireflies laughing at the sun and moon, an anthill belittling Mount Hua, wells and brooks despising the river and the ocean, or a magpie mocking a phoenix" (WND, 306).

The only way to open the eyes of such foolish people is not through logical arguments but rather by allowing them to see and come into contact with a vast and lofty state of life. If one does not possess the expansive state of life of a lion king — a state of life as vast as the sky and as broad as the sea — one cannot take leadership for *kosen-rufu*.

SAITO: In "On Persecutions Befalling the Sage," the Daishonin offers strict guidance out of concern for his followers amid the life-and-death struggle of the Atsuhara Persecution. Yet we can also feel his fervent determination that not a single one of his disciples should abandon faith. Whenever I read this writing, I am deeply moved by this example of the mentor's profound concern for the wellbeing of his disciples.

IKEDA: The Daishonin's strict words are also aimed at defeating devilish functions. All mentors love their disciples.

In fact, this principle also applies to our individual struggles for *kosen-rufu*. It is important that we each become a lion king and be firmly resolved not to let devilish functions come anywhere near the members in our area. It is only through this struggle that we ourselves can attain Buddhahood. That is why the

Daishonin says, "I pray that my followers will be cubs of the lion king" (GZ, 1589).

THE COLLUSION OF CORRUPT PRIESTS AND EVIL RULERS

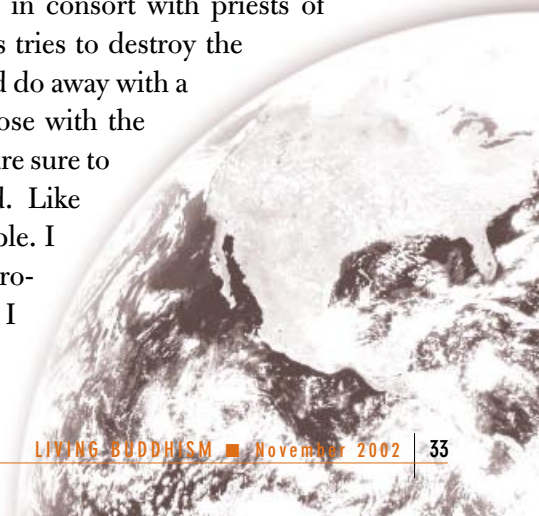
SAITO: This is also what the Daishonin conveys in the first part of "Letter from Sado," where he describes, based on his own experience, the state of mind of a lion king.

IKEDA: He teaches that those who strive with this courageous spirit, fearing no adversary, will attain Buddhahood without fail.

SAITO: Yes. He says they are sure to attain Buddhahood, "like Nichiren, for example" (WND, 302).

IKEDA: The Daishonin took the initiative to practice as the Buddha taught and led his disciples by example. No matter how many persecutions he faced, he resolutely battled the insidious functions of evil without retreating a single step. As a result, he cast off his transient status and revealed his true identity, manifesting the life-state of the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. He urges his disciples to fight in the same way as he and also attain Buddhahood.

MORINAKA: The Daishonin writes in "Letter from Sado": "It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong. Our contemporary scholars of the various schools are just like them. They despise a wise man without power, but fear evil rulers. They are no more than fawning retainers. Only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove one's real strength. When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teachings tries to destroy the correct teaching and do away with a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood. Like Nichiren, for example. I say this not out of arrogance, but because I





Sandro Vannini/CORBIS

Alexander the Great, on his expedition to India, was encouraged by his teacher Aristotle to "be like a lion." He thus had the image of a lion's eyes engraved on his armor and wore a helmet fashioned in the shape of a lion's head.

am deeply committed to the correct teaching. An arrogant person will always be overcome with fear when meeting a strong enemy, as was the haughty asura who shrank in size and hid himself in a lotus blossom in Heat-Free Lake when reproached by Shakra” (WND, 302).

IKEDA: Evil rulers and priests of erroneous teachings

will conspire to persecute a practitioner of the correct teaching. In Shakyamuni’s day, these were King Ajatashatru and Devadatta.⁹ In the Daishonin’s time, they were Hei no Saemon and Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple.¹⁰

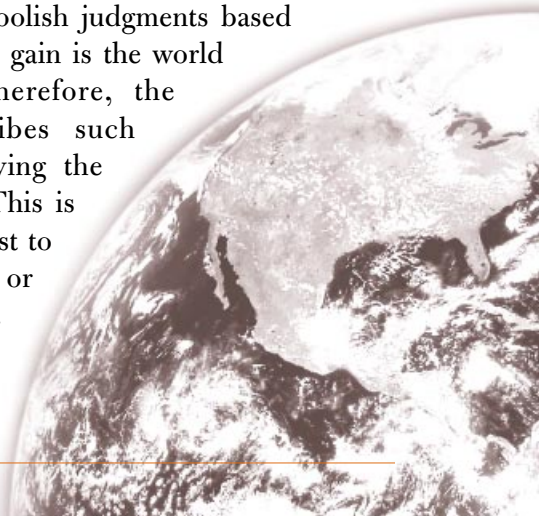
There are no more formidable enemies than evil rulers and priests of erroneous teachings acting in collusion. Evil rulers wield both material and social power. To go against that authority could lead to personal ruin and possibly even death. Priests of erroneous teachings, meanwhile, wield religious authority that exerts a powerful influence over people’s hearts and minds.

One who remains fearlessly committed to justice even when confronted with persecution arising from such collusion is a truly wise person, a person who has firmly grasped the truth.

The heart of a lion king is characterized by the courage that arises from perceiving the truth. It is also the courage that comes from revering and believing in the correct teaching. Hence, a person who possesses such courage fears no enemy, no matter how powerful.

SAITO: Buddhist monks were supposed to dedicate their lives to serving the people, the land and Buddhism. But influential priests and religious authorities during the Daishonin’s lifetime, such as Ryokan and Doryu,¹¹ ignored the veracity of the Daishonin’s words and instead made immediate gain and self-preservation the bases for their actions. Ingratiating themselves with secular authorities, they became the chief instigators of the persecution directed at the Daishonin.

IKEDA: To make foolish judgments based only on immediate gain is the world of Animality. Therefore, the Daishonin describes such individuals as having the nature of beasts. This is in complete contrast to having the nature or heart of a lion king.





MORINAKA: These Buddhist priests of other schools refused to engage in debate with the Daishonin, which he had requested. They were not interested in earnestly pursuing the Law. Had they possessed any genuine seeking spirit, they would have either sought instruction from the Daishonin or engaged him in direct debate. They did neither. They were cowards.

When the Daishonin was away from Kamakura, Ryokan gained popularity by letting it be known that he was ready to debate the Daishonin at any time. But when the Daishonin was in Kamakura, Ryokan pretended to be sick and stayed out of sight.¹² To behave in such a dishonorable manner is a manifestation of a devilish nature.

SAITO: The secular authorities also took a brutal, hard-line attitude toward the Daishonin. The persecution directed against him was invoked by powerful state authority. Even for feudal times, their actions violated accepted legal procedures and the proper path of government.

IKEDA: I would like to go into this in detail on another occasion. Let me just say, however, that when the Daishonin talks about people “wantonly distorting the important workings of government” and “violating the legal code” (GZ, 355), he is condemning the government’s actions against him as wanton transgressions of the rule of law. No matter how they may have tried to justify themselves, the authorities’ actions were blatantly unjust and unreasonable.

SAITO: Yet this didn’t trouble them in the least. As long as they could get away with it while they were in power, that was fine. That was their attitude. They didn’t care about the future.

MORINAKA: To govern in a way that is oblivious to the future is no more than barbaric gamesmanship; it isn’t worthy of the name governing. It creates an environment where people gather

to protect and promote vested interests.

IKEDA: This is a key point. Clearly, both the ruling authorities and the treacherous priests of the Daishonin’s day shared an attitude of disregard for truth and justice. Politics and religion ought to be informed by a lofty spirituality. Political or religious leaders who persecute a person of justice share a fundamental disbelief in truth and justice.

SAITO: Nikken is a case in point. If he had even the tiniest shred of faith in the existence of the Law that is eternal across the three existences of past, present and future, he could not persecute the children of the Buddha. This makes it patently clear that he is using Buddhism to further his own selfish ends.

GANDHI’S DEVOTION TO NONVIOLENCE AND TRUTH

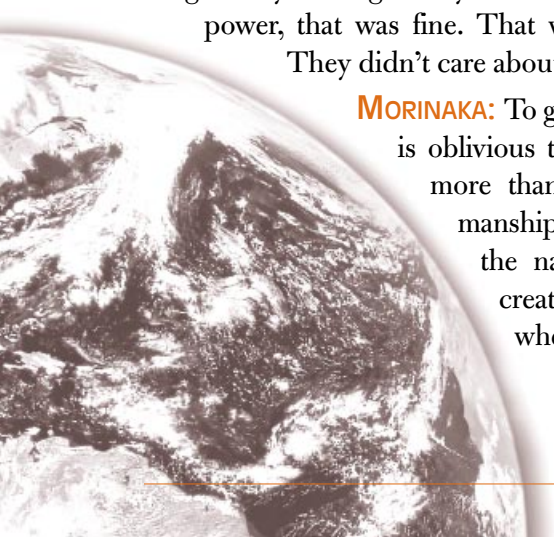
IKEDA: Returning to the passage from “Letter from Sado” that we cited above, it was not out of arrogance that the Daishonin fought with the heart of a lion king. Rather, he says it was because he was “deeply committed to the correct teaching” (WND, 302).

This is an important point. When we are deeply committed to the correct teaching above all else, we are liberated from the fear of death and from the selfishness that causes us to begrudge our lives. As a result, we are empowered to take on all challenges courageously.

At the start of “Letter from Sado,” the Daishonin discusses the parables of the boy Snow Mountains and the ascetic Aspiration for the Law. The protagonist in each of these tales offers his life for the sake of the Buddha’s teachings.

“Deeply committed to the correct teaching” means faith. It is the earnest spirit to lead a better life by revering and upholding the Law.

A person who possesses the earnest spirit to seek the truth is humble and filled with compassion and concern for others. I have found this to be a common trait among many of the world’s foremost thinkers and leaders with whom I have met and





conducted dialogues.

SAITO: If humanity neglects to seek the eternal truth, our planet will be ruled by anger and greed. This will set us on a direct course to world war and annihilation.

IKEDA: That is precisely why it is imperative to accomplish *kosen-rufu*, which could be called the challenge to realize a true spiritual renaissance. It is for this purpose that Nichiren Daishonin revealed and propagated *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. He teaches that if *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* spreads for the ten thousand years and more of the Latter Day of the Law, for all eternity, it will “block off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering” (cf. WND, 736).¹³

When we speak of eternal truth, it is not something that is just lying around quietly somewhere; it is found in rigorous struggle.

The Daishonin teaches that from the perspective of the Mystic Law, both delusion and enlightenment are one.¹⁴ As I also mentioned earlier, when we strive to defeat and break through our delusion or fundamental darkness, the power of our enlightened nature shines forth. Because we believe in our own Buddha nature, we can wage this inner struggle. Also, through continuous efforts to challenge ourselves in this way, our enlightened nature manifests as the power to create value. The Mystic Law is found only in such unceasing struggle.

SAITO: It is well known that the nonviolent struggles of Mahatma Gandhi were based on the principle of *satyagraha*, which means “holding on to truth.”

MORINAKA: *Satya* means “the way something should be.” In other words, it indicates the truth. *Graha* means “firmly holding on to something.”

IKEDA: Gandhi said that nonviolence and truth are like two sides of the same coin. He taught that nonvio-

lence is the means, and truth is the end.

No doubt Gandhi discerned that the strength of the powerful, as long as it is based on violence and hatred, is animalistic power. And he surely knew that succumbing to the animalistic urge to use violence against such power could not possibly lead to a fundamental solution. Instead, he called on people to arm themselves with the sublime power of truth and love.

Of course, there were critics who derided his approach as unrealistic. What can be said for certain is that Gandhi nevertheless went ahead and put his ideas into action. This is an indisputable historical fact. When an age comes where the power of the spirit is genuinely praised throughout the world, Gandhi’s actions will shine forever with undying brilliance.

Gandhi urged his disciples: “You have to stand against the whole world although you may have to stand alone. You have to stare the world in the face although the world may look at you with bloodshot eyes.”¹⁵ These words resonate with the “stand alone” spirit of Buddhism.

SAITO: In Buddhism, we find the example of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. The Lotus Sutra describes the drama of his struggle to spread the Buddha’s teaching, armed with the supreme truth that everyone is a Buddha and with the power of love for humanity, which he demonstrated by expressing the highest respect and veneration for all people. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is depicted as a person of selfless, dedicated action who boldly stood alone.

“SINGLE-MINDEDLY DESIRING TO SEE THE BUDDHA”

IKEDA: There is a saying to the effect, “An army of a hundred sheep led by a lion will defeat an army of a hundred lions led by a sheep.” Napoleon was fond of these words. Everything depends on one lion possessing great mental and spiritual strength.



Also, when we speak of pursuing truth, the focus is not abstract theory. Selfless devotion, or the spirit of not begrudging one's life, is the path to attaining Buddhahood. Only when we do not begrudge our lives can we perceive the eternal truth. Conversely, only when we perceive the eternal truth can we practice the teachings of Buddhism with the spirit of not begrudging our lives.

In "Letter to Gijo-bo," the Daishonin indicates that not begrudging one's life is the path to revealing the state of Buddhahood.

MORINAKA: The passage goes as follows: "The verse section of the ['Life Span' chapter of the Lotus Sutra] states, '...single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives.' As a result of this passage, I have revealed the Buddhahood in my own life. The reason is that it is this sutra passage that has enabled me to embody the Three Great Secret Laws, or the reality of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, that is found in the 'Life Span' chapter. But keep this secret, keep it secret...."

"I, Nichiren, say that 'single' [of 'single-mindedly'] stands for *myo*, or mystic, 'mind' for *ho*, or law, 'desiring' for *ren*, or lotus, 'see' for *ge*, or flower, and 'Buddha' for *kyo*, or sutra. In propagating these five characters [of Myoho-enge-kyo], practitioners should 'not hesitate even if it costs them their lives.'

"Single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha' may be read as follows: single-mindedly observing the Buddha, concentrating one's mind on seeing the Buddha, and when looking at one's own mind, perceiving that it is the Buddha. Having attained the fruit of Buddhahood, the eternally inherent three bodies,¹⁶ I may surpass even T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo, and excel even Nagarjuna and Mahakashyapa. The Buddha wrote that one should become the master of one's mind rather than let one's mind master oneself.¹⁷ This is what I mean when I emphatically urge you to give up even your body, and never begrudge even your life for the sake of the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 389-90).

IKEDA: The human mind is subtle. It changes according to the time and in response to various conditions.



Lynda Richardson/
CORBIS

A lion is valiant and resolute. It is powerful. It brims with a majesty that subdues all other animals. It is these qualities of the lion king that the Daishonin focuses on in his writings. He cites, for example, the passage in the Lotus Sutra that speaks of "the power of...the lion's ferocity" (LS15, 218). He also describes the Buddha as a lion king successfully refuting the non-Buddhist believers who outnumber him.

If we make our mind, which is always changing, our master, it will be difficult to follow a path of sure and steady progress. What we should depend on instead is the Law. We need to make the Law our master, and take a correct practitioner of the Law as our standard. From the perspective of ordinary people, the path to attaining Buddhahood lies in none other than single-mindedly seeking the Law and single-mindedly desir-



ing to see the Buddha.

In “Letter to Gijo-bo,” the Daishonin says that, through the sutra passage “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives,” he has revealed the Buddhahood in his own life and embodied the Three Great Secret Laws. He then interprets “single-mindedly” as meaning: 1) single-mindedly observing the Buddha, 2) concentrating one’s mind on seeing the Buddha, and 3) when looking at one’s own mind, perceiving that it is the Buddha.

SAITO: The passage “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha” is usually taken to indicate an ardent seeking spirit toward the Buddha. In other words, it is faith from the standpoint of those who seek the Buddha’s teaching. The Daishonin, with a particular focus on this spirit of faith to seek the Buddha, conclusively interprets the phrase as meaning “looking at one’s own mind and perceiving that it is the Buddha.”

IKEDA: That’s right. He indicates that the mind of an ordinary person who seeks the Buddha directly manifests itself as the mind of the Buddha. He says that attaining this inner enlightenment is “attaining the fruit of Buddhahood, the eternally inherent three bodies.”

The Daishonin manifested the mind of the Buddha and the “fruit of Buddhahood, the eternally inherent three bodies” in his life through his selfless struggles for kosen-rufu. He revealed them in the form of the Gohonzon for the benefit of all people of the Latter Day of the Law. Because he established the fundamental means to achieve genuine peace and happiness for all humankind, his achievement far surpasses that of T’ien-t’ai and Dengyo, Nagarjuna and Mahakashyapa.

We, too, can attain the mind of the Buddha and

the “fruit of Buddhahood, the eternally inherent three bodies” when we uphold faith in the Gohonzon and strive for kosen-rufu with the spirit of “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs us our lives.” This is the only way to attain Buddhahood in this evil age defiled by the five impurities.

THE “REALM OF IMMORTALITY” OF THE BUDDHA

MORINAKA: The life-state of Buddhahood and the courageous struggle to protect the Law are closely related.

IKEDA: Shakyamuni says he awakened to the truth of the Buddhist Law and attained the state of immortality or deathlessness. This does not mean that he will never die, but that he is liberated from the suffering of death and the fear of death. Fear of death is the source of all human fears. Because Shakyamuni overcame this most primal fear, there was nothing else that could possibly frighten him. This is the mind of the Buddha.

Shakyamuni expounds: “It is better to live one day seeing the deathless state than to live a hundred years not seeing the deathless state.”¹⁸ He also says: “It is better to live one day seeing the ultimate truth than to live a hundred years not seeing the ultimate truth.”¹⁹

SAITO: The “deathless state” and the “ultimate truth” are the same thing.

IKEDA: Shakyamuni further states: “Vigilance is the realm of immortality; negligence is the realm of death. People who are vigilant do not die; people who are negligent are as if dead.”²⁰ This is because the Buddha’s enlightenment is none other than a relentless struggle against devilish functions.

When Shakyamuni attained enlightenment, he uttered three verses: one at sunset, one in the middle of the night, and one at dawn. These demonstrate to us that Shakyamuni’s earnest practice and his enlightenment are one.

SAITO: Of the three, the verse he uttered at dawn goes as follows: “When the Dharma truly manifests in a practitioner who continues to meditate earnestly, at that time he has demolished the forces of the devil and abides in peace. He is just like the sun that shines in the sky.”²¹ The “Dharma” means the Law.

IKEDA: The vast state of mind of one who has attained enlightenment is like the sun illuminating the farthest reaches of the sky. Attaining such a state of life is inseparable from the struggle against devilish forces.

A sage who has defeated the devilish forces and attained the deathless state, an immense state of life like the sun, has nothing to fear, for such a state of life is one with the eternal Law.

Shakyamuni declared, in effect: “I have opened the gate of immortality! I have attained immortality!” and he embarked on a momentous journey to lead all people to happiness. This was not for his own sake. He initiated a struggle against the devilish forces pervading the universe, seeking to enable all people to become happy. When we constantly return to this starting point, we are immune to any sense of discouragement or hesitation.

SAITO: Nichiren Daishonin revealed the Buddhahood in his own life by translating into practice the passage “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives”; and he did so to open the way for all people to attain this state of immortality.

IKEDA: That’s right. And it is we of the SGI who are continuing along this path opened by the Daishonin that enables us to reveal our inherent Buddhahood—the path that, in the language of Shakyamuni, enables us to reveal the Dharma.

When we stand up with the heart of a lion king, the Mystic Law fills our beings, and the life force of the Buddha to battle all obstacles and devilish func-



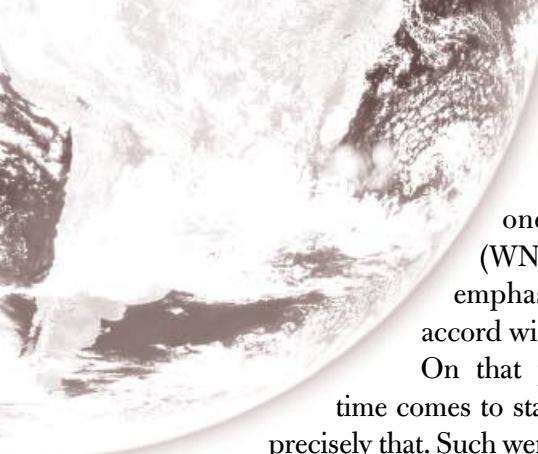
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. followed in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi’s nonviolent struggle for human rights. He declared: “The days ahead are difficult, but I have not lost hope. This is the only thing that keeps me going.” The source of indomitable action lies within our lives. Nothing can take that away from us. If our efforts derive from our own inner motivation, there is no way we can be defeated.

Flip Schulke/
CORBIS

tions wells forth. In other words, the path to attaining Buddhahood is found in earnest efforts such as striving like the sun to illuminate people’s lives and—as the lion king vanquishes “all other beasts—striving to vanquish all obstacles. This is why the Daishonin urges his disciples to practice just as he does. Only by struggling earnestly for people’s happiness in the same manner as Nichiren Daishonin can we attain Buddhahood.

MORINAKA: The struggle for kosen-rufu truly lies in this path of oneness of mentor and disciple.

IKEDA: That’s right. When we speak of the spirit of not begrudging our lives, that doesn’t mean we have to offer our bodies as a sacrifice like the boy Snow Mountains. Discussing this matter, the Daishonin says pointedly: “But should one sacrifice one’s life at a time when it is not required? In an age when there is no paper, one should use one’s own skin. In an age when there are no writing brushes, one should use



one's own bones" (WND, 302). Buddhism emphasizes practicing in accord with the time.

On that premise, when the time comes to stand up, we must do precisely that. Such were the circumstances in Japan before and during World War II. Foolish national leaders had appeared and the people were suffering. At that time, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, stood up purposefully.

The year before he was arrested, Mr. Makiguchi sharply criticized a speech by Japan's wartime prime minister Hideki Tojo on "unanimous cooperation" in the war effort,²² and declared that the main cause of society's confusion lay in the crimes of a ruling class ignorant of religion.

Naturally, the social conditions then were very different from today. It is for this reason that Buddhism teaches the importance of practicing in accord with the time.

MORINAKA: Without this perspective, Buddhism could devolve into a religion that glorifies death.

IKEDA: In "The Gift of Rice," the Daishonin declares that in contrast to the case of the boy Snow Mountains, the path of attaining Buddhahood for ordinary people does not lie in sacrificing one's body as an offering, but in "earnest resolve."

SAITO: He says: "As for the matter of becoming a Buddha, ordinary people keep in mind the words 'earnest resolve' and thereby become Buddhas" (WND, 1125).

IKEDA: "Earnest resolve" could also be replaced with the words "faith," "seeking spirit," "vow" or "heart of a lion king."

Devoting ourselves to kosen-rufu with the heart of a lion king, working throughout our lives to spread the Mystic Law — this, for us, is the meaning of "single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives."

Steadfastly upholding the Law in this defiled age of the Latter Day is an undertaking difficult in the extreme. Yet we are widely transmitting the teachings of Buddhism in this strife-filled saha world, in this world of endurance. Instead of seeking to practice in a safe and tranquil environment, we of the SGI have boldly ventured out into the whirling storm of society to defend the cause of the people and to lead people to happiness.

SAITO: To extend this metaphor, ordinarily it would be poor judgment to go outside on a stormy day; it would make much more sense to stay inside. But a leader of the Mystic Law who prays for the happiness of both oneself and others is the first to set out on a stormy day for places where embankments have collapsed or landslides have occurred.

IKEDA: The Buddha is someone who stands in the vanguard and sprints ahead in the midst of a storm. And his disciples follow right behind. The mentor might turn and call to them, "Never be defeated by the storm!"

The mentor yearns to help those who fight alongside him enjoy a state of supreme happiness. I think the Daishonin expresses this sentiment in the passage about the lion king in "On Persecutions Befalling the Sage."

FAITH ULTIMATELY MEANS COURAGE

MORINAKA: The passage goes as follows:

"Each of you should summon up the courage of a lion king and never succumb to threats from anyone. The lion king fears no other beast, nor do its cubs. Slanderers are like barking foxes, but Nichiren's followers are like roaring lions" (WND, 997).

IKEDA: As was mentioned earlier, "On Persecutions Befalling the Sage" is a writing that the Daishonin addressed to all his followers in the midst of the Atsuhara Persecution, the greatest persecution his followers had thus far suffered.

The followers in Atsuhara were neither nobles nor samurai nor priests; they were farmers occupying a



Complete, Total Freedom

A member who had avoided SGI activities for many years admitted a short time before dying: “I wish I’d chanted harder. I wish I’d done more activities. Now it’s too late, and I am filled with overwhelming regret.” These are haunting words.

You, the youth division members, are still young. You can chant daimoku to your heart’s content and accumulate unlimited good fortune. This is truly a wonderful thing. You are tremendously fortunate.

Since the age of 19, I have followed the guidance of my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, and single-mindedly dedicated my life to kosen-rufu. Therefore, I am confident that in lifetime after lifetime I will enjoy a state of life pervaded by inexhaustible good fortune and benefit.

The good causes you accumulate through Buddhist practice will manifest without fail in this existence. You will develop a totally unrestricted, magnificent state of life in exact accord with your inner determination. After death, moreover, your life will go on.

To borrow an analogy used by one leader, a person who has accumulated good fortune in this lifetime is like a rocket with a full tank of fuel.

In this lifetime and after death, such a person can joyfully, freely traverse the universe. There are more than a billion planets like the Earth in the universe. Those whose lives overflow with good fortune and benefit can be born anywhere in accordance with their desires and mission — they enjoy complete, total freedom.

The Hale-Bopp comet is presently visible. What makes a comet shine? Very simply, as the comet approaches the sun, icy material in its main mass vaporizes to envelop it in a hazy cloud of gas and dust. It combines to form the comet’s beautiful tail, brilliantly illuminated by the sun’s light. The nearer a comet draws to the sun, the brighter it becomes.

In our Buddhist practice, the Gohonzon, faith and SGI meetings are our sun. Plants and trees need sunlight to grow, and so do we. If we fail to attend meetings, then we deprive ourselves of the warm sunlight of faith and, like plants kept in the shade all the time, our lives will gradually wither.

The Daishonin urges us to earnestly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, even just once or twice, stressing that we will then definitely attain enlightenment. Now, some might immediately think: “All right! I’ll just put faith aside and take it easy, then embrace it seriously a year before I die.” But the Daishonin’s words are meant to spur his followers to greater efforts in their Buddhist practice, emphasizing the beneficial power of chanting even a single daimoku. He is drawing attention to what a great benefit it is to chant such amazing daimoku every day. This is how we should take the Daishonin’s words, resolving to exert ourselves even harder. The correct way to read the Goshō is to always interpret the Daishonin’s words from the standpoint of strengthening our faith.

Again, Buddhism is concerned with winning. President Toda said: Society is concerned with reputation; government is concerned with meting out justice; and Buddhism is concerned with victory.⁷ Reputation in society is as capricious as the wind. A country’s laws are judged by the people and change with the times. But the Buddhist law of cause and effect is absolute. Pretense and deceit are futile in Buddhism’s win-or-lose struggle.