

Session 5 - August

Chapter 1: The Lineage and Tradition of

Buddhist Humanism

The Soka Gakkai is a religious organization that practices Buddhist teachings originating from Shakyamuni Buddha in India and carried on and developed by the Indian Buddhist scholars Nagarjuna and Vasubandhu, who were revered as bodhisattvas; the Great Teachers T'ien-t'ai (Chih-i) and Miao-lo (Chan-jan) of China; the Great Teacher Dengyo (Saicho) of Japan; and Nichiren Daishonin. It maintains the orthodox lineage and tradition of Buddhist humanism that began with Shakyamuni, which affirms respect for life and for all human beings.

The Soka Gakkai bases itself on the Lotus Sutra, a central scripture of Mahayana Buddhism, and engages in Buddhist practice and activities adapted to modern times. It carries on the fundamental spirit of the Lotus Sutra as taught and exemplified by Nichiren Daishonin through his life and actions.

Shakyamuni

Shakyamuni was born a prince in ancient India. (His birthplace, Lumbini, is located in what is today Nepal.)

In his youth, Shakyamuni witnessed the unavoidable sufferings of existence—birth, aging, sickness, and death. Though still young and in good health, he realized that he, too, would someday experience them. He decided to leave his home and embark on a spiritual quest to find a solution to these fundamental sufferings.

As a prince, Shakyamuni led a life of great comfort and ease such that most people would envy. But when he became aware that the riches and luxuries people sought in life were ultimately fleeting and empty, he could find in them no real pleasure. This led him to search for a philosophy or teaching that would clarify the true meaning of human existence.

Buddha—The Awakened One

Shakyamuni was not satisfied with either the traditional spiritual teachings of India or the new schools of thought and belief that had become prevalent at that time. He sought instead, through the practice of meditation, to discover the fundamental causes and solutions to life's sufferings. In this way, he awakened to the eternal and universal Dharma, or Law, that pervades all life and the universe.

The name Shakyamuni is an honorific title meaning “sage of the Shakyas”—Shakya is the name of the clan to which he belonged and *muni* means “sage.” The title Buddha, by which he came to be universally known, means “awakened one.”

The Law to which Shakyamuni awakened became the core of the Buddhist teachings.

The Wisdom to Realize the Inherent Dignity of Life

Shakyamuni declared that people’s ignorance of the inherent dignity of their own lives results in their being ruled by egoism. This causes them to be consumed by immediate, selfish desires and driven to seek their own happiness at the expense of others. He taught, therefore, that the noblest and most admirable way for people to live with true dignity is to awaken to the eternal and universal Law within them and return to their original pure state of life that is free of fundamental ignorance or darkness.

The Buddha’s teaching in this regard amounted to what might be called a “restoration of the value of the human being.” It stressed how important it is for people to regain the supreme dignity of their lives and realize their infinite potential by bringing forth their inherent wisdom.

The Compassion to Respect All People

By awakening people to the value and dignity of their own lives, Shakyamuni taught them to understand and respect the value and dignity of others’ lives as well. This is the basic spirit of Buddhist compassion.

Shakyamuni once explained to a certain king that all individuals hold themselves most dear, and that, therefore, those who love themselves should not harm others.

Compassion as taught in Buddhism means to understand that others are as important and precious as we are and, as such, we should treasure them as we would treasure ourselves. It is a teaching of mutual understanding and respect.

The Lotus Sutra—The Essence of Mahayana Buddhism

Shakyamuni expounded his teachings for some 50 years, and after his death, his disciples compiled records of his words and actions. Those containing the Buddha’s main doctrinal teachings came to be known as “sutras.” Among all

his teachings, those pertaining to compassion and wisdom are the focus of the Mahayana sutras. And preeminent among these is the Lotus Sutra, which has been extolled as “the king of sutras.”

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha says that, by expounding it, he has fulfilled the wish he has held since the remote past to elevate all people to the same life state as his own. Further, he repeatedly calls upon countless disciples to inherit and share that eternal wish, or vow, and carry out the practice of compassion in order to fulfill it.

Nichiren Daishonin—The Votary of the Lotus Sutra

Nichiren Daishonin regarded the suffering of all people as his own and, in a time of great social turmoil, sought to find a way to relieve that suffering. He vowed to identify and carry on the Buddhist teachings capable of realizing genuine happiness and dignity for all people. He studied the commentaries and writings of earlier Buddhist scholars, while also carefully reading and examining on his own the many Buddhist sutras. As a result of his studies, he found the answer he had been searching for in the Lotus Sutra, which teaches the way for all people to give expression to their unlimited potential and bring it to life in human society.

Based on these principles of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin strongly resolved to help all people realize true happiness and dignity, and to actualize peace and security in society. He encountered life-threatening persecution by the authorities and fierce opposition from among the populace, owing to their lack of understanding of the correct teaching of Buddhism and their mistaken attachment to old ways of thinking. However, none of this deterred him in the least. He continued to take action in exact accord with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, encouraging and revitalizing the people, even at the risk of his life.

Nichiren Daishonin established the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, and he inscribed the Gohonzon as the object of faith, or devotion. By identifying, revealing, and establishing the teaching that is the essence of the Lotus Sutra, he opened the way for all people to attain Buddhahood.

In his treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” the Daishonin asserts that peace and social prosperity are indispensable to building individual happiness. He writes:

If the nation is destroyed and people’s homes are wiped out, then where can one flee for safety? If you care anything about your personal

security, you should first of all pray for order and tranquillity throughout the four quarters of the land, should you not? (WND-1, 24)

The focus of the Daishonin's lifelong efforts was establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land—that is, establishing the philosophy of respect for the dignity of life as society's guiding principle and building a world where people can live in peace and security.

This accords with efforts that practitioners of Buddhism have made since the time of Shakyamuni, to overcome the destructive nature of egoism that inflicts so much harm and suffering on people and society. It marked a new humanistic approach based on the fundamental spirit of Buddhism to enable people to realize happiness for themselves and for others—one that sought to foster trust, value creation, and harmony.

Key to this process was dialogue grounded in reason and humanity.

The Soka Gakkai—Bringing Nichiren Buddhism to Life in Modern Times

Through their selfless efforts, the Soka Gakkai's three founding presidents—Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda, and Daisaku Ikeda—revived the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Daishonin in modern times.

Soka Gakkai members engage in a variety of activities based on the guidance of the three founding presidents.

On a personal level, while challenging themselves in all areas of life, they use the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to reflect deeply on their lives and bring forth the hope and courage to deal with problems they encounter. In addition, they strive to develop rich character based on a solid commitment to humanistic values. This is the practice of human revolution.

Through everyday conversations with fellow members and attending Soka Gakkai meetings, members also deepen their understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's writings and SGI President Ikeda's guidance, share experiences in faith, and encourage and support one another.

In addition, they talk with friends and acquaintances about the principles and ideals of Buddhism and how their Buddhist practice has enriched their lives. In this way, they spread understanding and support for the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism and the humanistic activities of the Soka

Gakkai, while expanding the network of those who embrace faith in the Mystic Law.

The Westward Transmission of Buddhism and Worldwide Kosen-rufu

The practice of Nichiren Buddhism aims to enable people to realize happiness both for themselves and for others. It also places importance on individuals contributing to their communities as good citizens and becoming indispensable people whom others can trust and count on by fulfilling their roles at home, at work, and in society.

The Soka Gakkai is also actively engaged in addressing the global issues facing humanity today. Through its international antinuclear weapons exhibitions and initiatives in support of refugees, it highlights the importance of peace, respect for the dignity of life, and human rights. Also, through exhibitions on environmental themes, it aims to promote awareness of the need for efforts to protect the global environment.

The Soka Gakkai rediscovered the tradition of humanistic philosophy and practice originating with Shakyamuni and inherited by Nichiren Daishonin, recognizing and treasuring it as the very quintessence of Buddhism. In addition, the Soka Gakkai is carrying on this tradition and spirit in today's society and, through its activities and initiatives, working to pass them on to future generations.

Through dialogue aimed at deepening understanding and providing inspiration, we of the Soka Gakkai strive continually to cultivate and empower many able individuals who can, in their respective roles and fields, exemplify Buddhist humanism. This movement, which aims to realize the happiness of humanity as well as world peace, is called kosen-rufu.

Buddhism, which began in India, traveled eastward to Japan. Now, it is being transmitted back westward, spreading not only to the countries of Asia and India but throughout the entire world. This is referred to as the “westward transmission” or “westward return” of Buddhism. Today, our humanistic Buddhist movement has spread to 192 countries and territories around the globe.

The Three Treasures

The Soka Gakkai is the organization that, in modern times, has inherited the true spirit and lineage of Buddhism passed on from Shakyamuni.

It is a basic premise for all Buddhists to respect and treasure the Buddha, the Law (the Buddha's teachings), and the practitioners of the Law. Therefore, these three are regarded respectively as the treasure of the Buddha, the treasure of the Law, and the treasure of the Buddhist Order (community of believers). Together, they are known as the three treasures. The treasure of the Buddha is the Buddha who expounds the teaching, while the treasure of the Law is the teaching the Buddha expounds, and the treasure of the Buddhist Order is the gathering of people who believe in and practice that teaching.

In Sanskrit, the three treasures (*triratna*) are called *Buddha*, *Dharma*, and *Samgha*. The word *samgha* originally meant "a collective body" or "an assembly." Referring to the Buddhist Order, it was rendered phonetically into Chinese and then into Japanese with two characters, pronounced in Japanese as *sogya*. This was subsequently contracted to only the first character, *so*, which also came to be used to refer to Buddhist priests. Later, the term *samgha* was also rendered into Chinese and Japanese using two or three characters literally meaning "a harmonious gathering," pronounced in Japanese as *wago* or *wago-so*.

Over the long history of Buddhism, various teachings emerged to guide people according to their needs and capacities, the times, and changes that took place in society.

The specific description of the three treasures differs somewhat within each teaching. In East Asia, the treasure of the Buddhist Order, or *Samgha*, came to refer exclusively to male Buddhist priests, not the community of believers as a whole.

In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of sowing (that is, sowing the seeds of enlightenment, namely, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo), we revere the three treasures from the perspective of time without beginning, the fundamental dimension of existence. "Time without beginning" here is used to describe that which has always been present since the remotest past and will remain present into the eternal future. In terms of Buddhist practice, it refers to the original moment of attaining Buddhahood, when ordinary people reveal and manifest the eternal Mystic Law that has always been present within. Members of the Soka Gakkai eternally revere these three treasures in order to attain Buddhahood.

The treasure of the Buddha from the perspective of time without beginning is Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of beginningless time, or eternal

Buddha, who revealed in his own life as an ordinary person the fundamental Law for attaining Buddhahood.

The treasure of the Law from the perspective of time without beginning is the Gohonzon, or object of devotion, of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which Nichiren Daishonin revealed as the Law for universal enlightenment.

The treasure of the Buddhist Order from the perspective of time without beginning is Nikko Shonin (Nichiren Daishonin's direct disciple and successor), who protected and correctly transmitted the treasure of the Buddha and the treasure of the Law.

These are the three treasures to be revered in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of sowing.

When we revere (*nam*) these three treasures, we receive the benefit of sowing the seeds of enlightenment [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] and are thereby able to attain Buddhahood.

The word *nam* derives from the Sanskrit word *namas* (meaning "bow" or "reverence"), and was translated into Chinese as "to devote one's life," meaning to base oneself on something and follow it in body and mind, to believe in it and make it one's foundation.

Moreover, the treasure of the Buddhist Order in a broad sense refers to the gathering of people who correctly protect, transmit, and spread the three treasures as objects of respect and reverence. Today, the Soka Gakkai is the treasure of the Buddhist Order, for it is the organization that is carrying on the spirit and conduct of Nichiren Daishonin and advancing worldwide kosen-rufu.