

For Our Wonderful New Members—Part 1 [of 5]

Nichiren Buddhism Is a Teaching of Mentor and Disciple—Let's Walk the Great Path to Happiness Together and Win!

Lecture presented by Mai Ogushi
SGI Canada Study Department

Hi everyone, welcome to our March study podcast. Starting this month, we will be studying President Ikeda's 5-part study lecture series called "For Our Wonderful New Members". This month, we will study Part 1 titled, "Nichiren Buddhism Is a Teaching of Mentor and Disciple—Let's Walk the Great Path to Happiness Together and Win!"

President Ikeda begins the lecture as follows:

Nichiren Buddhism is the supreme way to develop wisdom for achieving happiness and peace. It is a teaching that enriches each person's life while striving at the same time to elevate the life state of humanity and create a society in which people can live together in harmony. The Soka Gakkai is growing dynamically as a global religious movement of the 21st century. All of you, our new members who have joined us at this time of the new era of worldwide kosen-rufu, possess a mission imbued with "great good fortune from past existences" (LSOC27, 356), just as Buddhism teaches.

Congratulations to those who joined SGI Canada this year, especially this month in March!!

Referring to this new study series, President Ikeda says,

I would like to discuss the core principles and practice of Nichiren Buddhism. My intention is to conduct this lecture as if we were seated together in a shady grove cooled by gentle breezes, engaging in a relaxed conversation. I will continue with this theme over several installments, and in this first one, I will focus on the most basic principle of all, mentor and disciple.

In the first 2 sections of the lecture, President Ikeda talks about how he vowed to write

the true history of the Soka Gakkai on behalf of his mentor, President Toda who made tremendous efforts for kosen-rufu after his release from prison on July 3, 1945. And it was on December 2, 1964 when President Ikeda began writing *The Human Revolution* – the story of President Toda’s life dedicated to kosen-rufu. The central theme of this novel is: “A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind.”

And on August 6, 2018, President Ikeda completed writing all 30 volumes of *The New Human Revolution* which chronicles the shared struggle of Sensei and his disciples all over the world.

President Ikeda shares a Gosho passage from “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life”, which teaches the deep karmic ties that link mentor and disciple.

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 Many Treasures certainly realized this truth. The [Lotus Sutra’s] statement, “Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers” [LSOC7, 178], cannot be false in any way. (WND-1, 217)

The heritage of the ultimate law of life—the most important teaching for attaining Buddhahood is transmitted from the Buddha to ordinary people, from mentor to disciple.

President Ikeda says,

Elevating the life state of disciples to the same level of the Buddha—this is the fundamental aim of Buddhism and the most important theme of the Lotus Sutra. It is none other than the path of mentor and disciple, the oneness of mentor and disciple. Precisely because it is grounded in the spirit of mentor and disciple, Nichiren Buddhism is a humanistic teaching, one in which ordinary people take the lead.

And we can read countless episodes of ordinary people taking the lead and transforming their life by practising Nichiren Buddhism in the novel *The New Human Revolution*.

In the Gosho “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life”, the Daishonin cites a passage

from “The Parable of the Phantom City” (7th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra: “Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers”. President Ikeda explains this passage as follows:

Shakyamuni is saying that his voice-hearer disciples had been his followers from the remote past, continually born together with him and carrying out bodhisattva practice alongside him in many different Buddha lands. On hearing Shakyamuni’s preaching, they remember that they originally possessed the life state of bodhisattvas, dedicated to Buddhist practice with the wish to relieve the sufferings of all living beings. The role of their mentor, the Buddha, is to remind them of their profound wish as bodhisattvas. This “profound wish” is the great vow for kosen-rufu.

Talking about President Toda, President Ikeda says,

[L]iving my life with Mr. Toda and walking the path of mentor and disciple alongside him was the greatest honour of my youth... The joy of encountering a rare person of great character, an individual who awakens us to what we are seeking in the depths of our beings – this is the mentor-disciple relationship. The correct teaching of Buddhism is transmitted through such human bonds.

For myself, the first time I felt like I understood the mentor and disciple spirit was after reading all 12 volumes of *The Human Revolution* at age 19 during my summer vacation. I still remember that tremendous feeling of deep appreciation for the three founding presidents and feeling very fortunate that I was an SGI member. And this feeling only continued to grow as I read *The New Human Revolution* and learned about the shared struggle of mentor and disciple, the shared struggle of Sensei and the pioneer members all over the world.

Another Gosho passage shared by President Ikeda teaches that prayer based on the oneness of mentor and disciple is the heart of faith for absolute victory. The passage is from “The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra” and it was written to Shijo Kingo.

No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire on wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. (WND-1, 1000–01)

From this passage, you can see how much the Daishonin is praying for his disciple, but at the same time, he is encouraging Shijo Kingo to take action with the same spirit and prayer as him.

To talk about the importance of united prayers of mentor and disciple, President Ikeda says,

Praying earnestly and persistently based on the united spirit of mentor and disciple is the key to faith that enables us to overcome every form of adversity and hardship.

He further explains the meaning of mentor and disciple taking action with the same spirit and prayer.

What lies at the heart of the mentor's spirit and prayer? It is the mentor's vow—the great vow for kosen-rufu made by the Daishonin in order to lead all people in the Latter Day of the Law to enlightenment. The Daishonin writes: "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth." As these words indicate, those who stand up with the same spirit as the Daishonin, taking his vow as their own, are all Bodhisattvas of the Earth... In modern times, Presidents Makiguchi and Toda stood up for kosen-rufu in accord with this teaching of the Daishonin, and gave rise to the Soka Gakkai.

The Daishonin also states:

Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]. (WND-1, 385)

This means, all of us SGI members are Bodhisattvas of the Earth who made a vow in the remote past to carry out kosen-rufu now in the Latter Day of the Law. And because we are Bodhisattvas of the Earth, we can chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, carry out our human revolution, transform our karma and realize happiness for oneself and others.

I would like to conclude with Sensei's words:

Because Nichiren Buddhism is a teaching based on the path of mentor and disciple,

we can awaken to our profound mission from the remote past; we can make our positive spirit and actions have an impact on the world around us; and we can call forth an endless stream of capable successors into the distant future.

This month is an important month especially for the youth division as March 16, 1958 is when President Toda passed on the baton for leading kosen-rufu to the youth division, only 2 weeks before his passing. In this Year of Advancement and Capable People, let's each stand up with a youthful spirit to further advance kosen-rufu in our own communities and carry out our human revolution like never before!!

Thank you