

To My Dear Friends of the Youth Division—Part 5

Kosen-rufu—the honour of striving to fulfill our vow as Bodhisattvas of the Earth

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Hi there. Thanks for joining us today. We're going to end the year by studying the fifth and final installment of President Ikeda's series of articles entitled "To my dear friends of the Youth Division". This month we're looking at "Kosen-rufu -- the honour of striving to fulfill our vow as Bodhisattvas of the Earth", which you can find in the November 2019 edition of *New Century*. There are no district study meetings scheduled for December, but we hope you'll find the time to read through the article on your own.

This month's article focuses particularly on waking up to our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

President Ikeda begins by stating clearly that the purpose of the Soka Gakkai is the realization of kosen-rufu -- the widespread propagation of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. And the three presidents of Soka Gakkai have all been absolutely committed to this goal. President Makiguch lectured his jailers on kosen-rufu, even after being arrested. President Toda vowed to introduce 750,000 households in his lifetime, and explained that one-to-one dialogue is the correct method to achieve kosen-rufu. President Ikeda, united in spirit with his mentor, has dedicated his life to kosen-rufu, the "noble mission" of the Soka Gakkai.

The first Goshō passage is taken from "On the Buddha's Prophecy".

The seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra states, "After I [Shakyamuni] have passed into extinction, in the last five-hundred-year period you must spread it [the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa [the entire world] and never allow it to be cut off". On the one hand, it is deplorable to me that more than 2,220 years have already passed since the Buddha's demise. What evil karma prevented me from being born in his lifetime? Why could not I have seen the four ranks of sages in the Former Day of the Law, or [such great Buddhist

teachers as] T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo in the Middle Day of the Law? On the other hand, I rejoice at whatever good fortune enabled me to be born in the last five-hundred-year period and to read these true words of the sutra.

The first part of the passage quotes Shakyamuni talking to his disciples and encouraging them to spread his teachings widely after his death. In fact, this is their mission. President Ikeda says:

Kosen-rufu is the mission of the Buddha's disciples -- that is, the mission to inherit and realize the Buddha's wish to free people from the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death, and enable all humankind to attain a state of lasting happiness.

In the second part of the Gosho passage, Nichiren Daishonin says that while he "deplores" not having been born in the time of Shakyamuni or other great Buddhist teachers, he also now "rejoices" at having been born in the evil Latter Day of the Law. This shift in perspective -- or transformation -- from "deploring" to "rejoicing" is very important.

We should remember that the Daishonin wrote this during his exile on Sado Island -- a time when he was experiencing great hardship, and when his prospects seemed bleak. Yet he is saying how grateful he is to be living at a time when he can stand up alone for kosen-rufu and help spread the Lotus Sutra around the world.

In the same way, we could find ourselves discouraged by the world around us today. It would be easy to "deplore" the state of the environment or the tenor of politics for example. But we can transform those feelings by understanding that we are Bodhisattvas of the Earth with a special mission in this day and age to spread the Lotus Sutra and help relieve people's suffering. This is why we are here.

President Ikeda comments:

Through the process of human revolution, we change from people who seek help from the Buddha to people who work alongside the Buddha to help others become happy. Rather than deploring our karma to be afflicted by the pains of the evil age of the Latter Day, we take on the joy-filled mission of a bodhisattva, supporting and encouraging those around us and building happiness for ourselves and others, while challenging the raging waves of adversity.

As we saw in the study material for the Basics of Buddhism exam, this is the concept of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma”. We could have taken the easy way out, but we chose to be born in our present circumstances so that we could help the people around us in a way that no one else can.

The example of Josei Toda is compelling. He realized his identity as a Bodhisattva of the Earth while he was in prison, and understood that his mission was to spread the Mystic Law. As President Ikeda says, “in the despair and misery of the postwar period, who else could have proudly vowed to carry out kosen-rufu at this moment?”

And President Ikeda goes on to say later:

The Lotus Sutra awakens us to the noblest and most fundamental meaning of life. It teaches that the supreme way of life is for each person to dedicate themselves to the great vow of kosen-rufu.

The second Gosho passage describes the way that we should work for kosen-rufu.

There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku. At first only Nichiren chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, but then two, three, and a hundred followed, chanting and teaching others. Propagation will unfold this way in the future as well. Does this not signify “emerging from the earth”?

This is very clear. We should all practice like Nichiren Daishonin, respecting all people equally as treasure towers and emissaries of the Buddha. And we should try to talk to other people, as much as we can. President Ikeda states:

First one individual stands up, becoming the starting point, then that person speaks to another—this most basic connection between individuals is the foundation for the growth of kosen-rufu at all times and in all places, on into the future.

This has always been the policy of the Soka Gakkai.

Nichiren Daishonin realized that he was a Bodhisattva of the Earth through studying the Lotus Sutra. Josei Toda came to the same realization while he was in prison.

We can have the same experience through doing activities, making a vow to achieve kosen-rufu, and striving “to carry out our struggle with courage and wisdom”. And, like the Daishonin and President Toda, we can experience the same joy -- “the greatest of joys”, an amazing freedom of action -- when we understand that we have our own mission for kosen-rufu that only we can achieve.

Joy is something that everyone can relate to. If we can communicate that joy to others through our experiences and our passion, they can begin to feel the same thing. When Daisaku Ikeda went to his first Soka Gakkai meeting, it was the “passionate commitment” of Josei Toda that impressed him the most. He talks about being “electrified by joy” both then and during President Toda’s lectures on the Lotus Sutra. It was this personal connection -- this dialogue between mentor and disciple -- that led Daisaku Ikeda to dedicate himself to striving for kosen-rufu with his mentor.

Nichiren Daishonin encouraged his disciples to make a great vow, and President Ikeda has taken the same path, noting that “kosen-rufu is the eternal adventure of mentor and disciple, a grand epic of a shared struggle unfolding throughout past, present and future”.

This is a time of great difficulties, as predicted in the Lotus Sutra; but also a time when great Bodhisattvas like you are appearing, to create “a network of individuals striving for happiness and peace.”

In the final paragraphs of the article, President Ikeda confirms that the Youth Division has inherited the baton of kosen-rufu from him and President Toda. And at the end of the article, he urges young people

- To stand up with faith dedicated to kosen-rufu where they are
- To demonstrate actual proof
- To challenge their human revolution, and steadily and patiently win the trust of others

“As long as we have you,” President Ikeda concludes; “the future of kosen-rufu is secure!”

As you can see, it’s a great article this month with some fascinating insights into our practice and lots of encouraging quotes.

You can find the entire article in the November 2019 edition of *New Century*. If you're not receiving *New Century* right now, you can subscribe by talking to your district leaders, or by visiting the publications page on this website.

We hope that you'll find this month's study interesting and useful, and we'll see you in 2020, the Year of Advancement and Capable People. Bye for now.