

The Winning Life

An
Introduction
to Buddhist
Practice

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10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

The Winning Life	5
The Practice	11
The Process	21
The Roots	33
Suggested Reading	45

The Winning Life

Each of us possesses the potential for a winning life. Within us is the ability to live with courage, to have fulfilling relationships, to enjoy good health and prosperity, to feel and show true compassion for others, and the power to face and surmount our deepest problems.

Crucial to living a winning life is to undergo an inner transformation that will enable us to bring out our highest human qualities and

change our circumstances. This process is a revolution of our own character, an individual human revolution.

Consider the following scenario:

Perhaps you feel underappreciated at work. Maybe your boss is belligerent or ignores you. After a while you develop a chip on your shoulder. Though you may be an expert at hiding negativity, every once in a while it rears its ugly head. Perhaps your co-workers or boss perceive you in turn as not being entirely committed to the success of your job, or that you have a bad attitude. Of course there are myriad reasons for your attitude and all of them “valid.” But whatever the reasons, you miss opportunities for advancement because of the poor relationship. This is a common scenario in today’s working environment.

But suppose you start coming to work with a new attitude that is not just a mental adjustment but an outlook bolstered by a deep sense of vitality, confidence and compassion, and based upon serious self-reflection. Your compassion leads you to have empathy for your boss’s situation. Armed with a new understanding, you treat your boss differently, offering support and finding yourself less and less discouraged by any negativity he or she may display toward you.

Your boss begins to see you in a new light. Opportunities present themselves.

This is obviously a very simple example and many of us would say this is a natural thing to do, but to live this way every day requires a basic change in our hearts and character. Once the change is made, like a never-ending domino effect, we can have continual impact on the people around us.

The practice of Buddhism as taught by Nichiren Daishonin is a catalyst for experiencing this inner revolution. It provides us with immediate access to the unlimited potential inherent in our lives by which we can live a winning life.

It is the promise of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism that we can attain a state of freedom and unshakable happiness for ourselves while creating harmony with others.

Buddhism is a way of life that — on the most fundamental level — makes no distinction between the individual human being and the environment in which that person lives. Like a fish in water, the two are not only inseparable, but each serves as a catalyst for the other. Thus, to a Buddhist, self-improvement and enhancement of our circumstances go hand in hand. The two are actually so interlocked that it is incorrect to consider them separate entities. In treating the sufferings and delusions of human beings, there is the accompanying benefit of better social

conditions, since the one is the source of the other — for better or worse.

While the word *Buddha* may conjure up images of a specific person from history or world religions courses we have taken, it is also a description of the highest state of life each of us can achieve. Buddha actually means “awakened one,” and the historical Buddha (known as Shakyamuni or Siddhartha Gautama) discovered that all humans have a potential for enlightenment — or “Buddhahood” — in the depths of their lives. This could be likened to a rosebush in winter: the flowers are dormant even though we know that the bush contains the potential to bloom.

Similarly, by tapping into our potential, we can find unlimited wisdom, courage, hope, confidence, compassion, vitality and endurance. Instead of avoiding or fearing our problems, we learn to confront them with joyful vigor, confident in our ability to surmount whatever life throws in our path.

Buddhism also shows us the most satisfying way to live among others. It explains that when we help others overcome their problems, our own lives are expanded. When our capacity increases and our character is strengthened, the source of our problems comes under our control. Because we make an internal change, our

relationship with our problems changes as well, wresting positive resolutions in any number of astounding yet tangible ways.



Through this process of inner reformation, we can also fulfill our dreams and desires. Rather than calling for the eradication of desires, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism recognizes that to be human means to have desires and that as we proceed in our human revolution we elevate our state of life, "magnetizing" our lives to attract that which will further our happiness.

Not only do we fulfill our desires as we change ourselves through Buddhist practice, but the very pursuit of those desires through our practice is like rocket fuel propelling us toward our enlightenment.

Life is ever-changing, moment to moment. The only constant in life is change. Our minds are constantly in flux, and while one minute we may have the courage to conquer the world, the next minute we can be overwhelmed by even the simplest occurrences. But through our steady, daily practice, we continually strengthen our resolve and ability to live a winning life.

Winning in life, however, is not the absence or avoidance of problems. Being human, almost by definition,

means we will constantly meet up with challenges. True happiness or victory in life is having the tools to take on each hurdle, overcome it, and become stronger and wiser in the process. Inside each human being is a storehouse of all the necessary traits to tackle every problem that confronts us. Buddhism is the practice that allows us access to this storehouse and unleashes our inherent power to take on all of life's challenges and win.

The Practice

There are three basics in applying Buddhism: faith, practice and study. They are the primary ingredients in the recipe for developing our innate enlightened condition, or Buddhahood. All three are essential. With this recipe, we will experience actual proof of our transformation in the forms of both conspicuous and inconspicuous benefit. The recipe is universal. These basics are the same in every country where this Buddhism is practiced.

Faith — Traditionally, religion has asked its believers to have faith in its tenets before accepting the religion, without any proof of the religion's assertions. But how can we have faith in something with which we have no experience? Unless a religion can provide benefit to the believers' daily lives and help them overcome their struggles, they cannot become happy by practicing it. Today, many religions lack the ability to truly empower people to change.

In Buddhism, faith is based on experience. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism emphasizes obtaining "actual proof" of the teaching's power. Faith begins as an expectation or hope that something will happen. At the start of our journey, if we are willing to try the practice and anticipate some result, we will then develop our faith brick by brick as examples of actual proof accrue.

Practice — To develop faith, we must take action. We strengthen our wisdom and vital life force by actualizing our Buddhahood each day in a very concrete way. Practice in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism consists of two parts: practice for ourselves and practice for others. Practice for ourselves is primarily the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Each morning and evening, believers participate in a ritual that, along with chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, includes recitation from two significant chapters of the Lotus Sutra—chapters which

explain that each individual holds the potential for enlightenment and that life itself is eternal. This ritual has been traditionally referred to as gongyo (literally, “assiduous practice”). Practice for others consists of action based on compassion to help give others the means to make fundamental improvements in their lives, similar to what we are undergoing through our own engagement with Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings. The development of our compassion through such practice for others is also a direct benefit to us.

Study — To gain confidence that this practice is valid and to understand why your efforts will bring about a result, it is essential to study the tenets of this Buddhism. The basis of study comes from the founder himself, Nichiren Daishonin. More than 700 years ago, he instructed followers in the correct way to practice; and his writings, which have been preserved and translated into English, give us valuable insight into how this practice will benefit us today.

The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) was formed to support practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and help them teach others about it on a global scale. Today, there are some 12 million members in 163 countries, and the American branch is called the SGI-USA (for more information, see “The Roots,” starting on p. 33).

The SGI has prepared numerous study materials that offer deeper looks at Buddhist theory, as well as practical applications through members' testimonies. (See "Suggested Reading" at the back of this booklet.) There are also English translations of the original teachings of Buddhism, such as the Lotus Sutra. By helping to build understanding and confidence, the study material provides vital encouragement for us—especially at crucial moments.



The basic prayer or chant is Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. This is the name of the Mystic Law that governs life eternally throughout the universe. Nichiren Daishonin revealed this law as the underlying principle contained in Buddhism's highest teaching, the Lotus Sutra. All life is an expression or manifestation of this law. Thus when we chant this Mystic Law, we attune our lives to the perfect rhythm of the universe. The result is increased vital life force, wisdom, compassion and good fortune to face the challenges in front of us.

The translation of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is as follows:

Nam—Devotion. By devoting our lives to this law through our faith, practice and study, we will awaken the

life-condition of Buddha, or enlightenment, inside ourselves.

Myoho—Mystic Law. As the Daishonin explained in one of his writings: “What then does *myo* signify? It is simply the mysterious nature of our life from moment to moment, which the mind cannot comprehend or words express. When we look into our own mind at any moment, we perceive neither color nor form to verify that it exists. Yet we still cannot say it does not exist, for many differing thoughts continually occur. The mind cannot be considered either to exist or not to exist. Life is indeed an elusive reality that transcends both the words and concepts of existence and nonexistence. It is neither existence nor non-existence, yet exhibits the qualities of both. It is the mystic entity of the Middle Way that is the ultimate reality. *Myo* is the name given to the mystic nature of life, and *ho*, to its manifestations” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 4; see “Suggested Readings”).

Renge—Literally, the “lotus flower,” which seeds and blooms at the same time. This represents the simultaneity of cause and effect. We create causes through thoughts, words and actions. With each cause made, an effect is registered simultaneously in the depths of life, and those effects are manifested when we meet the right environmental circumstances. Life itself is an endless series of

causes and simultaneous effects. Chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the deepest cause we can make in order to produce our desired effect.

Kyo — Sound or teaching. This is how the Buddha has traditionally instructed — through the spoken word, which is heard.

Myoho-rence-kyo is the Lotus Sutra's title and contains its essential meaning. Nichiren Daishonin added *namu* (contracted to *nam*), which comes from Sanskrit. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the ultimate invocation of life, often referred to as the language of the Buddha.

There are no prerequisites or rules as to what to chant for. We simply make the decision to begin chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. And by chanting, we experience the energy and wisdom to make our lives fulfilled.

In the sixty years since this Buddhism has been widely accessible through the efforts of the Soka Gakkai worldwide, millions have chanted about every conceivable problem and goal, from the most dire health and financial crises to the most urgent matters of the heart. Unlike in most Western religions, when we chant we are not praying to an external deity invested with human qualities like judgment. Our prayers are communicated into the depths of our being when we invoke the sound of the Mystic Law.

This universal Law is impartial, and no prayer is more or less worthy than another. The only issue is whether we can create value in our lives and help others do the same. As the Daishonin teaches, we attain enlightenment through a continual transformation that takes place in the depths of our existence as we seek to fulfill our desires and resolve our conflicts.

It is important to understand that our prayers are realized because we bring forth from within ourselves the highest life-condition and the wisdom to take correct action.



Once people begin experiencing the benefits of chanting, they may decide to make a deeper commitment and begin a more complete Buddhist practice. The first milestone after beginning one's practice is to receive the Gohonzon, the object of devotion for Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. The Daishonin inscribed his enlightenment in the form of a mandala called the Gohonzon, and believers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to a scroll form of the Gohonzon enshrined in their own homes. (For information on how to receive the Gohonzon, please ask your sponsor or contact the SGI organization at the address given at the back of this booklet.)

In the Gohonzon, the Daishonin graphically depicted his enlightenment, or Buddhahood, which is the enlightened life-condition of the universe. The important point here is that the same potential for enlightenment exists within each of us. And when we fuse our lives with the Gohonzon by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo to it, we tap into that enlightened life-condition, our own Buddhahood.

This is why the Daishonin calls the Gohonzon a mirror for the inner self. It is a way to see inside, to begin changing what we don't like and strengthening what we do like. We have the potential of many life-conditions, which appear when we come in contact with various external stimuli. For instance, someone may be rather mild-mannered and quiet, but another person might say something that sparks a show of temper. This temper or anger was dormant inside until provoked by the environment. To bring out our highest potential condition of life, our Buddhahood, we also need a stimulus. As our conviction develops, we will come to see that the Gohonzon is the most positive external stimulus, and chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo to it is the internal cause that will activate the latent state of Buddhahood in our lives.

The scroll of the Gohonzon is kept in an altar in the

practitioner's home where it can be protected from the daily routine of the household.



How often do we chant? Our basic ritual, which includes chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, reciting sections of the Lotus Sutra, and offering silent prayers, is carried out diligently each morning and evening. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the primary practice, is like fuel for an engine. Reciting the sutra is a supplementary practice, like adding oil to that engine. When the two are combined, it is most effective, and we feel the confidence of performing in top condition.

We are also free to chant as often as we like and to our heart's content. Most new practitioners will experiment with chanting until they experience something tangible, sort of like a "test drive." The duration of any particular chanting session is up to each individual's preferences and needs. The complete morning and evening ritual, however, should become the basis of our daily practice, a special time when we can communicate directly with the rhythm of the universe.



As we start to see actual proof of the power of our

Buddhist practice, we naturally come to share our experiences with friends and encourage them to try practicing as well. This sharing with others is another key to developing our inner potential for enlightenment, or Buddhahood.

The SGI's ultimate purpose is to contribute to the establishment of a peaceful world where all people experience happiness. We can make our lives larger and experience a stronger life-condition by endeavoring to help others. This way of life founded on compassion is instrumental in helping us strengthen our own Buddha nature. It is the altruistic interaction with people in our daily lives that will help us grow and become enlightened.

This is not only Buddhist theory — most people recognize the satisfaction and growth that accompany their efforts to truly help others. Practicing Buddhism to overcome our own problems or circumstances gives us insight we can share. We can chant for our families and friends, we can encourage others to practice, we can begin to show our own transformation so that others will be encouraged to find out the source of our great changes and newfound personal freedom.

The Process

The Buddha nature is not just a happy feeling or existential bliss; it is an actual state of life based on the Mystic Law of the universe. We do not need to understand exactly how this Mystic Law works before we can make use of it to our advantage. Laws of nature require neither our understanding nor our belief in them. Although we cannot see the law of gravity, we can attest to its existence. The law of life (Mystic Law), which Buddhism postulates, is far too profound

to be fully discussed here. Nonetheless, a few basic concepts can be explained as follows:

Eternity of Life

Some religions teach that we live only one lifetime, and when we die, we go permanently to some beautiful hereafter such as heaven or some horrific eternal torture chamber known as hell. Buddhism's view of eternal life, however, posits that one's life or essence has no real beginning or end. We live many lifetimes, repeating the cycle of birth and death. Like going to sleep at night, we refresh our bodies and wake up anew.

Buddhism explains that our lives possess an eternal and unchanging aspect. When we die, our life functions may stop, but the essence of our lives—our eternal identity, with myriad causes engraved in it—continues in a form that cannot be seen. Death then becomes the potential for life. Again, death is just like a rosebush in winter, which contains the potential for flowers (life) within, and when the correct external circumstances are present, the roses will bloom (birth).

Everything we've done until this moment adds up to who we are. This is the law of cause and effect. For every cause, there must be an effect. This is karma. We make myriad causes every day through our thoughts, words and

deeds, and for each cause we receive an effect.

Buddhism says that, in essence, this law of cause and effect is simultaneous. The moment a cause is created, an effect is registered like a seed planted in the depths of life. In fact, this law is symbolized by the lotus flower, which seeds and blooms at the same time. While the effect is planted the same instant the cause is created, it may not appear instantly. When the correct external circumstances appear, the effect will then transform from potential to actual. Looked at another way, our karma is like a bank balance of latent effects we'll experience when our lives meet the right environmental conditions.

As we live our lives (making causes), effects reside within us, and when we die, those effects dictate the circumstances of our birth in the next life. When we are reborn, therefore, we still face the same problems or karma from causes we have made. This goes a long way to explaining why people are born under such different circumstances—in other words, why people have different karma.

This principle suggests we can change our karma or destiny that we may have thought unchangeable. This is the great hope and promise offered by Buddhist practice. While in theory all we have to do is make the best causes to get the best effects, many times we feel we have little

control over the causes we make. A prime example is when we get angry at and say something we don't really mean to people who are close to us. At such times, the condition of anger may seem more powerful than our general nature. When we practice Buddhism, however, we can establish Buddhahood as our basic condition of life and face our circumstances filled with wisdom and compassion.

The Ten Worlds

One way that Buddhism explains life is through a concept known as “the Ten Worlds.” These are ten states or conditions of life that we experience within ourselves and which are then manifested throughout all aspects of our lives. Each of us possesses the potential for all ten, and we shift from one to another at any moment, according to our interaction with the environment. That is, at each moment, one of the Ten Worlds is being manifested and the other nine are dormant. From lowest to highest, they are:

Hell — This is a state of suffering and despair, in which we perceive we have no freedom of action. It is characterized by the impulse to destroy ourselves and everything around us.

Hunger — Hunger is the state of being controlled by

insatiable desire for money, power, status or whatever. While desires are inherent in any of the Ten Worlds, in this state we are at the mercy of our cravings and cannot control them.

Animality—In this state, we are ruled by instinct. We exhibit neither reason nor moral sense nor the ability to make long-range judgments. In the world of Animality, we operate by the law of the jungle, so to speak. We will not hesitate to take advantage of those weaker than ourselves and fawn on those who are stronger.

Anger —In this next state, awareness of ego emerges, but it is a selfish, greedy, distorted ego, determined to best others at all costs and seeing everything as a potential threat to itself. In this state we value only ourselves and tend to hold others in contempt. We are strongly attached to the idea of our own superiority and cannot bear to admit that anyone exceeds us in anything.

Humanity (also called Tranquillity) —This is a flat, passive state of life, from which we can easily shift into the lower four worlds. While we may generally behave in a humane fashion in this state, we are highly vulnerable to strong external influences.

Heaven (or Rapture)—This is a state of intense joy stemming, for example, from the fulfillment of some desire, a sense of physical well-being, or inner contentment.

Though intense, the joy experienced in this state is short-lived and also vulnerable to external influences.

The six states from Hell to Heaven are called the six paths or six lower worlds. They have in common the fact that their emergence or disappearance is governed by external circumstances. Take the example of a man obsessed by the desire to find someone to love him (Hunger). When he at last does meet that person, he feels ecstatic and fulfilled (Heaven). By and by, potential rivals appear on the scene, and he is seized by jealousy (Anger). Eventually, his possessiveness drives his loved one away. Crushed by despair (Hell), he feels life is no longer worth living. In this way, many of us spend time shuttling back and forth among the six paths without ever realizing we are being controlled by our reactions to the environment. Any happiness or satisfaction to be gained in these states depends totally upon circumstances and is therefore transient and subject to change.

In these six lower worlds, we base our entire happiness, indeed our whole identity, on externals.

The next two states, Learning and Realization, come about when we recognize that everything experienced in the six paths is impermanent, and we begin to seek some lasting truth. These two states plus the next two, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood, are together called the

four noble worlds. Unlike the six paths, which are passive reactions to the environment, these four higher states are achieved through deliberate effort.

Learning—In this state, we seek the truth through the teachings or experience of others.

Realization—This state is similar to Learning, except that we seek the truth not through others' teachings but through our own direct perception of the world.

Learning and Realization are together called the “two vehicles.” Having realized the impermanence of things, people in these states have won a measure of independence and are no longer prisoner to their own reactions as in the six paths. However, they often tend to be contemptuous of people in the six paths who have not yet reached this understanding. In addition, their search for truth is primarily self-oriented, so there is a great potential for egotism in these two states; and they may become satisfied with their progress without discovering the highest potential of human life in the ninth and tenth worlds.

Bodhisattva—Bodhisattvas are those who aspire to achieve enlightenment and at the same time are equally determined to enable all other beings to do the same. Conscious of the bonds that link us to all others, in this state we realize that any happiness we alone enjoy is

incomplete, and we devote ourselves to alleviating others' suffering. Those in this state find their greatest satisfaction in altruistic behavior.

The states from Hell to Bodhisattva are collectively termed "the nine worlds." This expression is often used in contrast to the tenth world, the enlightened state of Buddhahood.

Buddhahood —Buddhahood is a dynamic state that is difficult to describe. We can partially describe it as a state of perfect freedom, in which we are enlightened to the ultimate truth of life. It is characterized by infinite compassion and boundless wisdom. In this state, we can resolve harmoniously what appear from the standpoint of the nine worlds to be insoluble contradictions. A Buddhist sutra describes the attributes of the Buddha's life as a true self, perfect freedom from karmic bonds throughout eternity, a life purified of illusion, and absolute happiness. Also, the state of Buddhahood is physically expressed in the Bodhisattva Way or actions of a Bodhisattva.

The Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds

The Ten Worlds were originally thought of as distinct physical realms into which beings were born as a result of accumulated karma. For example, human beings were born in the world of Humanity, animals in the world of

Animality and gods in the world of Heaven. In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the Ten Worlds are instead viewed as conditions of life that all people have the potential to experience. At any moment, one of the ten will be manifest and the other nine dormant, but there is always the potential for change.

This principle is further expressed as the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds—the concept that each of the Ten Worlds possesses all ten within itself. For example, a person now in the state of Hell may, at the next moment, either remain in Hell or manifest any of the other nine states. The vital implication of this principle is that all people, in whatever state of life, have the ever-present potential to manifest Buddhahood. And equally important is that Buddhahood is found within the reality of our lives in the other nine worlds, not somewhere separate.

In the course of a day, we experience different states from moment to moment in response to our interaction with the environment. The sight of another's suffering may call forth the compassionate world of Bodhisattva, and the loss of a loved one will plunge us into Hell. However, all of us have one or more worlds around which our life-activities usually center and to which we tend to revert when external stimuli subside. This is one's basic life-tendency, and it has been established by each

individual through prior actions. Some people's lives revolve around the three evil paths, some move back and forth among the six lower worlds, and some are primarily motivated by the desire to seek the truth that characterizes the two vehicles. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to elevate the basic life-tendency and eventually establish Buddhahood as one's fundamental state.

Establishing Buddhahood as our basic life-tendency does not mean we rid ourselves of the other nine worlds. All these states are integral and necessary aspects of life. Without experiencing the sufferings of Hell ourselves, we could never feel true compassion for others. Without the instinctive desires represented by Hunger and Animality, we would forget to eat, sleep and reproduce ourselves, and soon become extinct. Even if we establish Buddhahood as our fundamental life-tendency, we will still continue to experience the joys and sorrows of the nine worlds. However, they will not control us, and we will not define ourselves in terms of them. Based on the life-tendency of Buddhahood, our nine worlds will be harmonized and function to benefit both ourselves and those around us.

The Oneness of Life and Its Environment

The principle of the oneness of life and its environment describes the inseparable relationship of the

individual and the environment. People generally have a tendency to regard the environment as something separate from themselves, and from the viewpoint of that which we can observe, we are justified in drawing this distinction. However, from the viewpoint of ultimate reality, the individual and the environment are one and inseparable. Life manifests itself in both a living subject and an objective environment.

“Life” indicates a subjective “self” that experiences the karmic effects of past actions. The environment is the objective realm where the karmic effects of life take shape. Environment here does not mean one overall context in which all beings live. Each living being has his or her own unique environment in which the effects of karma appear. The effects of one’s karma, both good and bad, manifest themselves both in one’s self and in the environment, because these are two integral phases of the same entity.

Since both life and its environment are one, whichever of the Ten Worlds an individual manifests internally will be mirrored in his or her environment. For example, a person in the state of Hell will perceive the environment to be hellish, while a person in the world of Animality will perceive the same environment as a jungle where only the strong survive.

This idea has important implications. First, as already

mentioned, we need not seek enlightenment in a particular place. Wherever we are, under whatever circumstances, we can bring forth our innate Buddhahood through the Buddhist practice, thus transforming our experience of our environment into the Buddha's land. This is an act of freedom whereby we liberate ourselves from control by circumstances. For example, if we sufficiently elevate our condition of life, we will not be crushed by adversity but can command the strength and wisdom to use it constructively for our own development.

Moreover, as we accumulate good karma through Buddhist practice, the effects of the karma will become apparent not only in ourselves but also in our environment, in the form of improved material circumstances, greater respect from others, and so forth.

From this standpoint, one's environment stretches out to encompass the whole dimension of space. Our enlightenment is therefore not confined to ourselves but exerts an influence on our families, communities, nations, and ultimately all humanity. The principle of the oneness of life and its environment is the rationale for asserting that the Buddhist practice of individuals will work a transformation in society.

Buddhism expands the entire reality of life and shows the way to live a winning life—the most fulfilled existence.

The Roots

Buddhism is one of the world's oldest religions. At its core are the quests to understand life and to help people overcome their basic sufferings. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism traces its origins to the teachings of Shakyamuni, who is said to have lived some 2,500 years ago. Known as Siddhartha Gautama in his youth, at age 19 he was a royal heir in India. His palace life was far removed from the everyday life of common people, and when he

discovered how people suffered outside the palace walls, he set out to discover how to overcome the roots of basic human suffering.

He made it his life's purpose to find solutions to the inescapable sufferings of life. He sought the foremost teachers of his day and practiced the extreme forms of asceticism they advocated as the means to realize the ultimate reality of life. After following their teachings for several years, and on the point of death from fasting, Shakyamuni realized that their path was too extreme. He awakened to the wisdom of the "middle way," neither the extreme of austerity nor of indulgence.

After accepting food from a young girl, he sat down under the "Bodhi" (a pipal) tree. There he entered a profound meditation and finally attained enlightenment. He began at once to teach anyone who would listen. He would engage admirer and objector alike in dialogue and discourse to convey his awareness and insight into the human condition.

Since the depth of Shakyamuni's understanding far surpassed that of even the most learned of his day, he had to prepare his listeners by first teaching them more easily understood doctrines, using parables and everyday analogies in the process. In this way, he could elevate the life-condition of those he taught, while always holding to

his ultimate aim of showing people that they inherently possessed Buddhahood and could develop the qualities needed to conquer their sufferings.

For some forty years following his awakening at age 30, he imparted to others portions of his own enlightenment. During the final eight years of his life, he expounded his ultimate teachings, which were later compiled as the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra is unique among the teachings of Buddhism because it affirms that the attainment of enlightenment is possible for all people without distinction of race, gender, social standing or education. Buddhism, as epitomized in the Lotus Sutra, is a powerful, life-affirming, egalitarian and humanistic teaching.

Following Shakyamuni's passing, various schools of Buddhism spread throughout Asia. It was only natural that a broad range of interpretive schools should emerge, since in his fifty-year teaching career he had employed a wide variety of means by which to transmit his enlightenment to people of various capacities and circumstances.

The Lotus Sutra gained particular prominence as it spread through Central Asia into China, the Korean Peninsula and Japan. At the same time, however, confusion began to reign as to the true nature of Buddhism

and the relative superiority of the sutras. To solve the problem, leading minds of the time compared and systematized the various teachings. Eventually a scholar from China called Chih-i (later known as the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai) developed a definitive standard by which to judge them. This standard classified Shakyamuni's teachings according to the order in which he expounded them, the nature of the particular doctrine taught in each sutra and the method of its exposition. By classifying the teachings in this manner, T'ien-t'ai clarified that all the sutras were means of preparation for the highest teaching, the Lotus Sutra.



It was Nichiren Daishonin in Japan, however, who took the final all-important step to transform profound theory into a simple practice and thereby enable ordinary people to reveal their highest state of life in the midst of day-to-day realities.

The Daishonin realized his purpose was to reveal this ultimate truth to the people of his time and for all eternity. Hence, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is for the present age, and Shakyamuni and T'ien-t'ai prepared the way.

Nichiren Daishonin lived from 1222 to 1282 during a

tumultuous time of social unrest and natural catastrophe. The son of a fisherman, he became a religious acolyte and after a period of intensive study he came to realize that the Lotus Sutra constitutes the heart of Buddhist teachings.

He also brought it out of the realm of theoretical contemplation into an actual experiential practice when he first chanted Nam-myoho-enge-kyo (Devotion to the Mystic Law) on April 28, 1253, and later inscribed the Gohonzon (the physical object of devotion for all humanity).

He subsequently dedicated his life to sharing his realization, despite facing numerous persecutions for preaching what was considered a subversive doctrine. By declaring that embracing this law had the power to allow all individuals to attain enlightenment, the Daishonin disturbed the ruling class of politicians and priests who adhered to other forms of Buddhism. Nonetheless, he gained a loyal following of believers. He especially embraced ordinary people from all walks of life.

After Nichiren Daishonin's passing, his closest disciple, Nikko, kept the true spirit of Buddhism alive. For the next six centuries, the Daishonin's Buddhism was maintained by a relatively small religious group until the early part of the twentieth century.



Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944), an educator in Japan, was passionately dedicated to the reform of the Japanese educational system, which emphasized rote learning over critical independent thinking. He strove to develop modes of education that would unleash the potential of the individual. After studying Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, he realized that they could provide the philosophical underpinnings for the value-creating education that had been his lifetime goal.

In 1928, Mr. Makiguchi committed himself to practicing this Buddhism along with a young teacher, Josei Toda (1900–58), whom he had met in 1920. In 1930, they founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, or "Value Creation Education Society," as a laypersons' organization, drawing its membership principally from among fellow educators.

Japan was then plunging headlong into war, a course diametrically opposed to the Buddhist reverence for life. As World War II progressed, the militarist government redoubled its efforts to crack down on all forms of dissidence. Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda found themselves under increasing pressure to compromise their beliefs and practice the state religion of Shintoism.

Finally, the government asked the high priest of

Nichiren Shoshu to accept a Shinto object of worship and enshrine it at the head temple. This would be in direct contradiction with the teachings and spirit of Nichiren Daishonin. The priests, fearful of their own safety and wanting to curry favor with the authorities, accepted this governmental order to protect themselves from persecution.

Mr. Makiguchi, however, refused to violate the spirit of the Daishonin's Buddhism. His resistance to the government order led to his and Mr. Toda's arrest and imprisonment as "thought criminals" in 1943 along with other Soka Kyoiku Gakkai leaders.

Mr. Makiguchi, at 72, endured brutality and privation in prison, refusing on all counts to compromise his convictions. The records of his interrogations reveal a man propounding, without a trace of hesitation or fear, the very thoughts that had led to his incarceration. On November 18, 1944, he died at 73 in the Tokyo Detention House.

Josei Toda survived the ordeal and was released on July 3, 1945, just weeks before Japan's surrender. The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai had all but disintegrated under wartime persecution. Though physically ravaged by two years in prison, he immediately set about rebuilding the organization. It was renamed the Soka Gakkai (Value Creation Society).

Mr. Toda resolved that the mission of this new organization should not be confined to the field of education but rather that it be expanded to the betterment of society as a whole. The Soka Gakkai rapidly grew under Josei Toda's leadership to more than 750,000 households by the time of his death in 1958.

His responsibilities were assumed by Daisaku Ikeda, who became the third president on May 3, 1960. Mr. Ikeda had met Mr. Toda at age 19 and committed himself to practicing the ideals of the Soka Gakkai, making Mr. Toda his mentor.

Mr. Ikeda has dedicated himself continually to fulfilling the visions Mr. Toda shared with him in the areas of peace, culture and education, based on the Daishonin's teachings. Through his international travels beginning in 1960, Mr. Ikeda has contributed greatly to Buddhism becoming a truly global religion. In 1975, the Soka Gakkai International was formed, and today, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is being practiced by more than 12 million people in 128 countries under the auspices of the SGI.

The American organization was formed in 1960 when Mr. Ikeda visited the United States. At the time, there were just a handful of people practicing this Buddhism in the United States. They were primarily

Japanese women who had married Americans, as well as some students from Japan. But with Mr. Ikeda's encouragement, they soon grew into a nationwide organization now called the SGI-USA.



The SGI believes that the development of peace, culture and education are essential to building a better world. Centered on this ideal, the SGI carries out activities globally. In 1957, Josei Toda issued a declaration against the use of nuclear weapons, labeling them criminal under any circumstances; and he called upon youth of the world to work to abolish these weapons of mass destruction.

Taking up this challenge, the SGI, under Mr. Ikeda's leadership, has been working tirelessly to create the conditions for a peaceful world.

The efforts to fulfill Mr. Toda's vision of peace have resulted in the SGI's wide-ranging activities, for instance, as a nongovernmental organization with official ties to the United Nations. The SGI has sponsored public information programs that aim through exhibitions, symposia and other forums to promote awareness of the issues of war and peace and the feasibility of peaceful alternatives. Major international exhibitions on such

themes as disarmament, human rights and environmental protection have traveled throughout the world bringing public awareness of these critical issues.

Personally, Mr. Ikeda has engaged in dialogues with international academics and intellectuals like British historian Arnold Toynbee and with policy-makers and political leaders such as Zhou Enlai, Corazon Aquino, Mikhail Gorbachev and Nelson Mandela, exchanging ideas on how to create world peace and better understandings among people, and many other topics. He has received numerous awards and recognition from universities and nations around the world for his efforts to promote peace.

Applying the spirit of Buddhism to modern times, he has also founded several institutions dedicated to peace and intercultural dialogue. The Toda Institute for Global Peace and Policy Research conducts independent research and networks with peace researchers, activists and policy-makers to provide a global forum for the discussion and implementation of cooperatively designed policy strategies. And the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century provides a venue for pooling wisdom and fostering dialogue among the world's peace-oriented cultural, philosophical and religious traditions, thus developing a network of global citizens in the pursuit of peace.

In 1963, Mr. Ikeda founded the Min-On Concert Association, which has sponsored tours of performing groups from some seventy countries in order to promote understanding among diverse peoples through music, dance and other cultural expressions. He also founded the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum in 1983, which is engaged in a wide-reaching program of exchange with cultural institutions throughout the world.

Education has been of central concern to the Soka Gakkai since its inception, and many ideas set forth by Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda have been brought to fruition through the Soka School System. From preschool to post-graduate, the Soka system undertakes education designed to stimulate wisdom and engagement within society. On May 3, 2001, Soka University of America will open as a full-fledged liberal arts college in Southern California.



At the heart of this global movement are discussion meetings. These neighborhood gatherings where people share experiences, encourage one another and study Buddhism together are the backbone of the SGI. They are forums where anyone can speak freely, ask questions, or simply sit and watch. Meetings are held regularly in

homes or in community centers. The activities are free and anyone is welcome to attend and participate.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is truly a religion that crosses all boundaries, with a diversity rarely seen in other institutions. This is proof that by overcoming our impasses, by winning over our own lack of understanding and constantly striving to awaken the Buddha nature inside each of us, we can build a lasting world peace.

There is no way to legislate, dictate or force peace onto humanity. As Daisaku Ikeda writes in the foreword to his book *The Human Revolution*: "A great revolution of character in an individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will cause a change in the destiny of all humankind."

In our jigsaw-puzzle world, then, it soon becomes obvious that through each person becoming a winner and helping others to do the same, society will change.

This is Buddhism's blueprint for world peace or "kosen-rufu." The only way for people to live together in peace is for many individuals to awaken to the need for an inner revolution. For one happy person's influence on his or her environment will have a profound and lasting effect.

Suggested Reading

For further information on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we recommend the following books, among many others. These books are available through any local SGI-USA community center bookstore, or through the SGI-USA national headquarters:

SGI-USA
606 Wilshire Blvd.
Santa Monica, CA 90401
(310) 260-8900

Doctrine

The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin

Fundamentals of Buddhism

Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death

Buddhist History

The Life of Nichiren

The Living Buddha

Buddhism: The First Millennium

The Flower of Chinese Buddhism

History of the Soka Gakkai

The Human Revolution, vols. 1–12

History of the SGI

The New Human Revolution (ongoing series)

Also, your favorite neighborhood or on-line bookstore carries the following Middleway Press books:

*The Way of Youth: Buddhist Common Sense for
Handling Life's Questions*

*The Buddha in Your Mirror: Practical Buddhism and
the Search for Self*

We also invite you to learn more about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism through our weekly newspaper, *World Tribune*, and monthly study magazine, *Living Buddhism: Journal for Peace, Culture and Education*. Individual copies are available at SGI-USA bookstores nationwide, or for subscription information please call: (800) 835-4558.

e-mail: SGISUBS@aol.com

Also, please visit our SGI-USA website:

<http://www.sgi-usa.org>

