

To Our Future Division Members, the Torchbearers of Justice—Our Hope for the Future – Part 1 [of 3]

“The True Aspect of All Phenomena”—Take the Lead in Spreading the Philosophy of Respect for the Dignity of Life

Lecture presented by Tony Meers

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We begin the Year of Youth and Dynamic Progress with the first of three lectures addressed to the Future Division. In the second SGI Online Study Lecture, Study Department Leader Masaaki Morinaka spoke about giving a lecture to the Future Division members based on another of President Ikeda’s lectures addressed to them, which we will be studying later this year. Mr. Morinaka expressed how inspired he was with the feedback he received from many of the Future Division members. He said that over the past two years, Sensei has repeatedly stated that a great leader is sure to emerge from among the Future Division members, who have had to endure hardships during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mr. Morinaka said this means it is all the more important that we as adults become good role models and a source of hope for our Future Division members.

In this lecture, Sensei speaks directly to the Future Division members, who include our Young Lions Group and Young Phoenix Group. He always communicates with young people of all ages with the greatest respect and with full confidence in their boundless potential. He is straightforward in discussing the challenges humanity faces, especially the ongoing struggle to end the pandemic. A new philosophy of hope is needed, and capable people dedicated to creating value can bring it to the world. The Lotus Sutra is the teaching that enables all people to attain Buddhahood. The story of the dragon king’s daughter depicts an eight-year-old attaining Buddhahood. This indicates the great mission of the Future Division. Sensei states:

My mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, often said that children are emissaries from the infinite past, born in this world to enable their parents and others around them to attain Buddhahood. He also called them the treasures of the future, saying that we should think of them as emissaries from the future and take the best care of them.

Never have the hopes and expectations for you, our Future Division members, been higher. Why? Because by turning the challenges of the present into the main stage for your growth, your generation will be at the forefront when we celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding (in 2030) and will determine the course of the 21st century. You are precious treasures tasked with the mission of creating a brighter future for humanity. Each of you is a great source of hope for global society.

This lecture focuses on Nichiren Daishonin's writing "The True Aspect of All Phenomena." The following passage emphasizes our direct relationship with Nichiren Daishonin and our identities as Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be known as a votary [practitioner] of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. (WND-1, 385; "The True Aspect of All Phenomena")

When young people discover the power of chanting daimoku, the door opens to a future of endless possibilities. When even one prayer is answered, the weight of the world can be lifted from their shoulders. To feel for the first time that we can actually change how we feel through our own efforts to practise is the most liberating experience imaginable, especially during our youth, when we have so many uncertainties about everything. As Sensei says, "But ultimately, your Buddhist practice is the driving force for tackling and overcoming every one of those issues." He also says, "Our prayers not only empower us to solve our immediate problems, but also spur our growth and help us lead lives dedicated to the happiness of others." And, "Faith in Nichiren Buddhism does not teach passive reliance on some external power. Rather, through earnest prayer and serious effort, we can bring forth our true inner strength, our unique inherent potential. In so doing, we can improve and develop ourselves."

The quest for a meaningful life is fuelled by the newfound ability to revitalize ourselves every day with our gongyo and daimoku. When we search for a treasure, we have confidence that the treasure exists and can be found. This makes the search exciting, even when we have to struggle or have extra patience.

To reach the infinitely precious treasure deep within the earth of your own life, you need to dig in the correct way—that is, to persevere patiently in correct Buddhist practice. As long as you continue digging, you will acquire strength and wisdom, dynamically forge your life force, and lead a positive, productive life.

Speaking of the boundless and immeasurable benefits we receive through our faith in the Gohonzon, Mr. Toda used to say that all our experiences have meaning in the realm of faith. In time we will realize with profound appreciation that nothing was wasted and everything had a purpose. From the early days of our organization until now, countless members have experienced this personally and can testify to its truth. Such actual proof demonstrated by members across the globe speaks volumes of the validity and profundity of Nichiren Buddhism.

That is why maintaining faith is so important.

Viewed in the long term, we come to see that our prayers are always answered. When we look back later, we can fully appreciate the experiences we've had, realizing that we achieved even more than we aimed for and that all of our struggles helped us to understand the suffering of others.

Sensei's encouragement to the Future Division members is to forge their faith in their youth. We should read his encouragement at our study meetings so that everyone, especially the Future Division members, can hear it:

By striving in our Buddhist practice, we can turn all challenges into fuel for personal growth and opportunities to make great breakthroughs. There is not the slightest doubt that in the end our lives will exceed our expectations. It's therefore crucial to persevere with steadfast faith until the last moment.

The Daishonin writes: "Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be known as a votary [practitioner] of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life" (WND-1, 385).

Now is the time for you, the Soka Gakkai's young successors, to concentrate on your personal growth, putting your studies and health first. I hope you will become people who can make outstanding contributions to kosen-rufu, others' happiness, and the welfare of society.

In discussing the statement in the Goshō, "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth," we learn that we have made a vow to appear at this time to actualize kosen-rufu. We also learn that kosen-rufu means happiness and peace

for everyone. Each of us, as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, can bring about such a world by caring about people on an ever-expanding scale; Sensei explains:

When we expand the realm of our concern, we bring forth even greater courage, wisdom, and compassion, and are filled with a deep sense of meaning and purpose. Soka Gakkai members everywhere are striving day after day to elevate their own lives while contributing to the happiness of others and to society. This is the path to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime and the practice of human revolution. The key is to have “the same mind as Nichiren.”

Sensei encourages the Future Division members to have the same “vast heart” of the Daishonin, which is shared by the three eternal mentors of the Soka Gakkai.

The following two points are of the greatest importance:

1. The Daishonin states that we are without doubt the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who have appeared voluntarily in this world with a mission for kosen-rufu. Bodhisattvas are people who work actively for world peace and the happiness of others, bringing their own lives to shine in the process.
2. Bodhisattvas of the Earth are great bodhisattvas on a par with the Buddha who have chosen to be born in this evil age rife with problems and suffering. As a result, they experience the same problems and suffering as everyone. But their life state is different because they are proudly aware of their important mission.

It is crucial that we thoroughly understand the second point. Sensei describes the tenacity never to give in to adversity, to keep reaching out to others, and to use our own personal struggles to show that everyone can overcome all misfortune and become happy. He points to the incredibly profound principle that is the ultimate key to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime, as we are.

Soka Gakkai members throughout the world are demonstrating this principle, and we are among them, together with our children and young friends. Every single one of us has a great mission, and every one of us is a living example. As such, President Ikeda expresses his greatest wish:

Though your efforts may be quiet and go unrecognized, I hope you will stay true to yourselves and dedicate your lives to the Soka path of mentor and disciple,

working to contribute to people's happiness and to society.

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 [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo]. 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. (WND-1, 385; "The True Aspect of All Phenomena")

This passage expressing gender equality was truly revolutionary in the time of Nichiren Daishonin. Just as the sun sheds its light equally on all, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism illuminates the lives of everyone without discriminating or leaving anyone behind. As Bodhisattvas of the Earth, we have the mission to bring this light to others, regardless of who they are. We reveal and experience our own Buddhahood when we step out of our own concerns and reach out to others with courage and compassion.

And it is the Soka Gakkai that has spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo across the globe, just as the Daishonin proclaimed: "Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku" (WND-1, 385).

Mr. Toda declared: "We must foster fine young people who can work for the benefit of society and all humankind. That is the purpose of the Soka Gakkai."

Referring to the statement, "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," the Daishonin assures us that kosen-rufu can be achieved and indicates how it will unfold—beginning with the inner transformation of one person and steadily spreading to one after another person. This is the formula of human revolution, through which we can change the destiny of a nation and ultimately the entire world. Expanding our network of friendship and trust is kosen-rufu.

Nichiren Daishonin ends this writing with the foundation of our practice: "Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also

teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase”

Chanting with a sincere and open heart brings forth strong life force. Studying Buddhism fills us with conviction and makes our inherent wisdom shine. I hope you will exert yourselves in the “two ways of practice and study,” making your lives shine their brightest and illuminating all around you with hope and courage.

To conclude his lecture, Sensei expresses his heartfelt hopes and prayers for his youthful successors. He provides his own example, who as President Toda’s disciple achieved all of his mentor’s plans and dreams.

He assures the Future Division members:

You are all lions. You are suns. No matter what unpleasant, harsh, or challenging situations you may encounter, hold your heads high and advance with confidence and pride along the path of your mission.

The Soka path of mentor and disciple is the path to victory in life and to happiness and peace for all humanity. That path opens widely before you!

Our Future Division members in Canada have made important strides forward, despite the obstacles and limitations resulting from the pandemic. Let’s unite together with our precious successors and our many new members and advance again this year toward 2030!

Thank you!