

## A People-Centred Religion—Transmitting the Philosophy of Respect for Life to the Future

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Hi there. Thank you so much for all your efforts to support the Youth Division General Meetings in March. Let's keep on talking with our fellow members, friends and family as we work toward the Youth Division Peace Events in July.

This month's study is titled "A People-Centred Religion – Transmitting the Philosophy of Respect for Life to the Future". You'll find the article in the March 2024 New Century. I hope you'll have a chance to read it before your district study meeting this month.

As the title suggests, the article explains that a religion that is truly for the people should be based on dialogue and behaviour that respects all life.

President Ikeda begins by talking about Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda's 1957 *Declaration Calling for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons*, which marked the beginning of Soka Gakkai's initiatives for peace. How can we accomplish President Toda's vow to eliminate the possibility of nuclear war? How can we create peace in this world? Ikeda Sensei says:

...we must always remember that the essential way to make Mr. Toda's hopes a reality is through our day-to-day efforts to share and spread the Buddhist philosophy of human revolution.

Peace begins with helping each person recognize and develop their highest potential. Expanding our network of people committed to dialogue is a process through which we draw forth our own and the other person's infinitely noble Buddha nature. That is the most fundamental action and surest step to root out the evil behind nuclear weapons. (NC, p. 29)

Nichiren Daishonin himself used constant dialogues with those around him to reveal the Mystic Law. Always focused on the happiness of each individual, respect for all life, and the creation of a truly peaceful world, the Daishonin taught "the importance of dialogue and respectful behaviour as the requisites for a religion that works for people's happiness".

The first Gosho passage in the study is taken from the final part of “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land”.

**The host exclaimed with delight: The dove has changed into a hawk, the sparrow into a clam. How gratifying! You have associated with a friend in the orchid room and have become as straight as mugwort growing among hemp. . . But a person’s heart may change with the times, and the nature of a thing may alter with its surroundings. Just as the moon on the water will be tossed about by the waves, or the soldiers in the vanguard will be cowed by the swords of the enemy, so, although at this moment you may say you believe in my words, I fear that later you will forget them completely.**

**Now if we wish first of all to bring security to the nation and to pray for our present and future lives, then we must hasten to examine and consider the situation and take measures as soon as possible to remedy it. (WND-1, 23–24)**

“On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” is one of the Daishonin’s most important writings. We will be studying it as part of the SGI Canada Level 2 Study Exam in October. It is in this Gosho that Nichiren clearly explains the connection between religious awakening and world peace.

“On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” is written in the form of a one-on-one dialogue between a host and his guest. To begin with, both host and guest share their concern about the suffering they see around them. As the host calmly explains the situation from the standpoint of the Lotus Sutra, he is able to answer the guest’s angry objections, and encourage the guest to work with him to end people’s suffering.

We may not have exactly that kind of a discussion with the people we are talking to, but those principles of finding common ground and remaining calm, respectful and persistent are all important, whatever the conversation.

In the Gosho passage, Nichiren refers to “a friend in the orchid room”, meaning someone who is able to influence others in a positive way – in other words, a good friend. In today’s world, the Soka Gakkai is clearly a gathering of good friends, sharing the challenge of human revolution, and doing its best to encourage people and

change society. This has all been accomplished by the sort of positive dialogue that we find in district meetings and home visits.

The way that we behave and speak to people is so important. President Ikeda says that “Power of character, humanity and sincere behaviour are the keys to opening people’s hearts and broadening dialogue”.

Timing is also crucial. If we make the effort to speak to another person now, we can encourage and inspire them, and they will go on to encourage others. This is how we can change society. Ikeda Sensei comments:

Change comes from having faith in people’s positive potential and actively going among them to forge heart-to-heart bonds. Starting in our communities, let us make even greater efforts to reach out to others with courage, open hearts, and unflagging commitment. Now is the time for us to confidently create waves of dialogue that inspire and revitalize people’s hearts.

Dialogue that brings people together and efforts to support and encourage others based on a wish for their happiness are the essence of humanistic religion. (NC, p. 32)

The second Gosho passage is taken from the letter titled “The Prosperity of Your Family and Descendants”.

**Although it is the Latter Day of the Law, you [Ikegami Munenaga] are not only wise but were born unselfish. Because of this, you are a person who has enabled all three of you [you, your brother, and your father] to become Buddhas and all your relatives on both your mother’s and father’s side to attain enlightenment.**

**Please be assured that your children and descendants as well are certain to flourish and prosper eternally. I could write countless pages citing passages from the Buddha’s lifetime teachings but still not finish saying all I wish to about this. My wasting illness, however, is causing me severe discomfort, so I will not go on and on. I truly, truly wish to see you in person and speak to you again. (GZ, new ed., 1498)**

This letter is part of Nichiren Daishonin's decades-long encouragement of the Ikegami brothers and their wives. The brothers had been under extreme pressure from their father to abandon their faith in the Daishonin's teachings. Thanks to Nichiren's guidance, the brothers had maintained their faith, and had even convinced their father to begin practising the Mystic Law.

President Ikeda comments that this shows:

...the Daishonin's great compassion in empathizing with people and his sincere wish to awaken their belief in their potential. He imparts to his disciples the boundless confidence and courage to overcome the hardships and challenges they may encounter as they practise the great teaching for the enlightenment of all people. His words convey an incredible degree of care and concern for each person. (NC, p.33)

As philosopher Lou Marinoff notes, this kind of individual attention is "how goodness spreads through a society". Our daily efforts to encourage the people around us will change the destiny of humanity and create a peaceful world. Kosen-rufu – the widespread propagation of Nichiren's teachings – is nothing more than having respectful dialogues with our friends, family and neighbours every day. Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda said:

Introducing Buddhism to others one-to-one is the unchanging formula for realizing kosen-rufu. It is also a formula that accords completely with democratic ideals. It may seem a painstaking course, but it is the surest way forward. One wave stirs another, eventually creating a thousand, then ten thousand waves. That's how kosen-rufu is achieved... There is no other way but to persevere in one-to-one dialogue to share the correct teaching of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, convince each person of its truth, and thereby help them free themselves from suffering. We of the Soka Gakkai have made that work our mission. (NC, p. 34)

Following that great tradition of the Soka Gakkai, we in SGI Canada have made dialogues and visits the centrepiece of our activities this year. The best example of this is the Youth Division's "One-by-one" visiting campaign, which will run throughout the year.

Ikeda Sensei writes that through our efforts to talk with people and relieve their suffering, we are creating a "steady stream of capable people... in regions and countries around the world". As those capable people go on to introduce others to Nichiren Buddhism, we are all directly working toward worldwide kosen-rufu and world peace.

President Ikeda concludes with a famous passage from the *Orally Transmitted Teachings*: “The voice carries out the work of the Buddha” (OTT, 4).

He goes on to say:

Inspiring hope in others and conducting refreshing dialogue that brings people closer is essential to our mission as practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism. (NC, p. 35)

As you can tell, it’s a great study this month, and very encouraging. You can find the study material in the March 2024 New Century. If you’re not receiving New Century right now, you can subscribe online at [sgicanada.org](http://sgicanada.org) or by talking to your district leaders anytime.

I hope you have a great study meeting this month. Thanks for listening today. Bye for now.