

## Message

Daisaku Ikeda

**T**O share in this opening moment of the “Lotus Sutra Manuscripts—The World’s Spiritual Heritage” exhibition, cosponsored by the International Academy of Indian Culture, the Institute of Oriental Philosophy and Bharat Soka Gakkai, I wish to offer my heartfelt congratulations and some reflections on the significance of this auspicious occasion.

I should like first to pay tribute to Dr. Lokesh Chandra for his wholehearted support and assistance, and to all those who in their concerted efforts have made the ideal of this exhibition a reality.

The collaboration between the Institute of Oriental Philosophy and the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, set a precedent in 1998 with the previous exhibition, “The Lotus Sutra and Its World: Buddhist Manuscripts of the Great Silk Road,” the first public showing of these rare and ancient works, in Japan. The exhibition has since toured Austria and Germany.

Of similarly great import is the fact that it should be followed by the opening of the “Lotus Sutra Manuscripts—The World’s Spiritual Heritage” exhibition in the land where Buddhism itself began, in the ancestral home of the Lotus Sutra.

In our dialogues—published last year under the title *A Dialogue on Philosophies of the Orient*—Dr. Chandra once said that originating in India, Buddhism was transmitted to China, the Korean peninsula and eventually to Japan over the course of several centuries. He noted that in our times, the Lotus Sutra is known beyond Asia in every region of the world, acknowledging the contribution of Soka Gakkai International in this vein. Dr. Chandra also pointed to the illuminating metaphor that the Lotus Sutra has traveled to western lands from the East, just as the sun makes its way westward from the eastern skies.

And so we regard as both an honor and joy the opportunity to cosponsor the present exhibition on the Lotus Sutra in the land of its birth, for the endeavor is but a small measure of appreciation toward repaying the great spiritual debt of gratitude we owe to your esteemed nation.

Let me mention here that the International Academy of Indian Culture figures prominently as a leading Indian institution in Buddhist and Oriental studies. The Academy was founded in 1935 by the late Dr. Raghu Vira, a world renowned scholar of Oriental studies and linguistics, with the aspiration of bestowing the spiritual heritage of the East to future generations.

Dr. Raghu Vira was convinced that it is through culture that life thrives and sublimates humanity. He urged the necessity therefore to learn about and understand the many cultures of the many peoples of the world. We must look not only to the history of cultures created in the past, he believed, but also to creating new cultures.

Placing focus on the research of Buddhist culture, Dr. Raghu Vira as a concerned individual, a private citizen, set for himself a mission of national proportion and established the International Academy of Indian Culture.

An extensive collection of Oriental literature initiated by Dr. Raghu Vira, the Satapitaka Series project, continues under the auspices of his son, Dr. Lokesh Chandra, and has developed into the world's peerless cultural undertaking of its kind.

When in Japan in 1998 for the exhibition "The Lotus Sutra and Its World: Manuscripts of the Great Silk Road," Dr. Chandra was delighted by the throngs of visitors who appeared. He commented that they came not solely on the reputation of the rare Lotus Sutra manuscripts but also on being moved by the spirit and passion of those who had organized the exhibition.

It is hoped that as many people as possible should have the opportunity to view the present exhibition in India, so as to be inspired by the passion of the pioneers who devoted themselves to the Lotus Sutra and, above all, to be touched by the noble vision of the late Dr. Raghu Vira and Dr. Chandra.

I hope further that the exhibition will dispatch to the world the spiritual air and profound philosophy of the Lotus Sutra, providing nurturing sustenance for the life-force of all humanity.

The etymology of the word "culture" which also appears in the Academy's name, can be traced to the word "cultivate." Thus it can be said that the essence of culture is the cultivation and development of human life and human spirit.

On the relationship between culture and religion, my mentor and second president of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, believed the Lotus Sutra to be the quintessence of Buddhism. Through observation and study, he was convinced of the beneficence of the Lotus Sutra throughout history

to provide the spiritual flow in which people are rejuvenated and culture flourishes.

Nichiren, the Buddhist reformer who appeared in 13th century Japan, taught that *Myo of Myoho-rence-kyo*, the title of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese translation, has three meanings—"to open," "to be endowed and perfect" and "to revive."

"To open" means to open and reveal in a person the Buddha nature, the infinitely vast potential possessed equally by all human beings.

"To be endowed and perfect" describes the reality that no phenomenon in either the human or natural domain arises independently. The phrase speaks of all phenomena existing in a state of symbiosis, an interdependence vital to the evolving, universal weave of the macrocosm. By corollary, the microcosm of our lives is contained in the very workings of the universal macrocosm; likewise, the macrocosm of universal life is reflected in the microcosm of the individual life.

"To revive" is, in a word, inner-motivation, which means that inherent in human life is the constant force that breaks the lethargy of habit and propels one toward the dynamic rhythms of a creative life. It is the source that revitalizes all phenomena.

I believe that these principles found in the Lotus Sutra—"to open," "to be endowed and perfect" and "to revive"—are the qualities by which all human life may be elevated and, in turn, lead to flourishing culture.

We find, for example, that India, the first land of the Lotus Sutra, gave birth to Gandharan art and the rise of Mahayana Buddhism in the time of King Kanishka, thus contributing to the confluence and mutual prosperity of the cultures of East and West.

The China of the great teacher Chih-i (Zhiyi) saw the unifying influence of the T'ien-t'ai school which professed the Lotus Sutra, and so the rise of cosmopolitan culture in the Sui and T'ang dynasties.

In the Japan of Prince Shotoku, who revered the Lotus Sutra, and then of the Great Teacher Dengyo, who founded the Japanese T'ien-t'ai school, the Asuka and Heian cultures, respectively, flowered.

These remarkable achievements in the elevation of cultures bring to mind the late Dr. Arnold Toynbee, the 20th century's leading historian of civilization, for he believed that "a civilization's religion is the source of its vitality."<sup>1</sup>

I believe that the Lotus Sutra embodies a philosophy of unlimited hope. Its brilliant light of wisdom emits rays of iridescence that reflect and refract like a diamond, as it transforms decline into prosperity and confrontation into harmony.

And so we join with you today cherishing the hope of humanity, of

creating diverse cultures in the 21st century for the harmonious blooms of coexistence to emerge resplendent in the sunlight of the Lotus Sutra.

I pray from the bottom of my heart for the further development of the International Academy of Indian Culture as well as for the continued good health and glorious victory of everyone here today.

Let me close on thought of the passage from the Parable of the Medicinal Herbs, found in the Lotus Sutra, that depicts a great land of coexistence, where all phenomena extol their existence from breathing in the air, the very life, of the Buddha:

The equality of the Buddha's preaching  
is like a rain of a single flavor,  
but depending upon the nature of the living being,  
the way in which it is received is not uniform,  
just as the various plants and trees  
each receive the moisture in a different manner.  
The Buddha employs this parable  
as an expedient means to open up and reveal the matter,  
using various kinds of words and phrases  
and expounding the single Law,  
but in terms of the Buddha wisdom  
this is no more than one drop of the ocean.  
I rain down the Dharma rain,  
filling the whole world,  
and this single-flavored Dharma  
is practiced by each according to the individual's power.  
It is like those thickets and groves,  
medicinal herbs and trees  
which, according to whether they are large or small,  
bit by bit grow lush and beautiful.<sup>2</sup>

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Arnold Toynbee and Daisaku Ikeda, *Choose Life: A Dialogue* (London: Oxford UP, 1976) 291.

<sup>2</sup> Burton Watson, trans., *The Lotus Sutra* (New York: Columbia UP, 1993) 104.