

Preface

The Kingdom of Nepal, the birthplace of Shakyamuni Buddha, is one of the spiritual homes of humanity. In November 1995, I visited the country for the first time and had the honor of meeting His Majesty King Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev. I was awarded an honorary doctorate in literature at Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu, and delivered a commemorative lecture entitled “The Living Lessons of Gautama Buddha.” I still have vivid memories of the beautiful smiles of the people who extended a heartfelt welcome to me. The *Suttanipāta* (422-423) gives an account of the Shakyas, a brave tribe who had lived in the southern foothills of the Himalayas since antiquity. They called themselves “Scions of the Sun.” I cannot but sense a wonderful relationship between Nepal, the “Land of the Sun,” and the Buddhist teachings of the great sage Nichiren (Sun Lotus) which the Soka Gakkai upholds.

In November 1992 I had a chance to talk with Prof. Soorya B. Shakya, former vice-chancellor of Tribhuvan University, in Tokyo. Our dialogue focused on “Shakyamuni, the teacher of humanity,” and the Lotus Sutra. Professor Shakya made an insightful observation on the “Ceremony in the Air” described in the sutra, saying that the ceremony symbolizes the Buddha’s vast state of life, which in its present state contains the lands of the ten directions (i.e., entire dimensions of space) of both the past and future. In other words, Buddhahood transcends time and space. The great sage Nichiren described the “Ceremony in the Air” as one that spans the three existences of past, present and future. With regard to the innumerable bodhisattvas who emerged from within the earth during the ceremony, he declared, “Nichiren alone took the lead in carrying out the task of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.... If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth.” He meant that both he and his disciples were Bodhisattvas of the Earth appearing in the latter day.

In this evil age of the five impurities, as the sutra puts it, people can hope to manifest their innate Buddha nature only when they courageously fight a spiritual struggle against injustice. That is exactly what Josei Toda, my mentor and the second president of the Soka Gakkai, did. Mr. Toda was made a prisoner of conscience by the militarist regime during the Second World War. While in prison, he read the Lotus Sutra with his entire being until he finally realized the truth: “The Buddha is life itself; it is the reality of the cosmic life.”

He then envisioned himself participating in the Ceremony in the Air as one of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. It was his intuitive grasp of that eternal ceremony in all its solemnity and glory that led Mr. Toda, after being released from prison, to uphold and

spread the essence of the Lotus Sutra as the key to the inner revolution for all people. I remember my mentor admonishing us to “strive as hard as possible to help elevate the moral character of all human beings to the highest level.”

During our November 1992 meeting in Tokyo, Professor Shakya presented me with a precious reproduction of a Lotus Sutra manuscript (no.3-678) from the collection of the National Archives of Nepal. The country is a veritable treasure-house of sutra manuscripts from the medieval era. I was told that, in addition to the vast collection of the national archives, manuscripts preserved from two or three centuries ago are often found even in private homes. These are indeed indispensable resources for research on Buddhist literature, especially sutra texts. I would like to express my deepest respect for the people of Nepal who have treasured their priceless cultural heritage in this way.

The publication of this Nepalese palm-leaf version of the Sanskrit Lotus Sutra text (no. 4-21) represents a noble undertaking to revive Shakyamuni’s spirit in our own time. I hope that it will contribute to the preservation of a spiritual legacy of humankind and provide material for research in the study of Sanskrit sutra texts. I believe that it will be a source of light in the twenty-first century. In closing, I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to the officials and the staff specialists of the National Archives of Nepal as well as of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture of the Kingdom of Nepal for their invaluable assistance and cooperation in making this publication possible.

Daisaku Ikeda
President
Soka Gakkai International
August 24, 1998