

Key Passages from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*

[2] “Introduction” Chapter of the Lotus Sutra

Burn with the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu! Problems and Struggles Are a Source of Growth

Lecture presented by Antonio Choi
SGI Canada Study Department

Hi everyone, and welcome to the study podcast for July. This is Ikeda Sensei’s lecture series on *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*. Today we are studying the second in a series of fourteen lectures.

From this installment, we will examine key passages from each chapter of the Lotus Sutra, beginning with the “Introduction” chapter.

The second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, began his efforts to rebuild the Soka Gakkai after World War II by lecturing on the Lotus Sutra. In those and later occasional lectures on the sutra, he always started by briefly discussing the “Introduction” chapter, explaining the standpoint from which he read the Lotus Sutra as a guide for our own reading.

President Ikeda explains:

Mr. Toda gained the unshakable conviction that the Lotus Sutra is a scripture elucidating the truth of one’s life and that the Bodhisattvas of the Earth have vowed to appear in this world to spread the Mystic Law, the teaching for the enlightenment of all people in the Latter Day. This led to his insight that the Lotus Sutra is the drama of human revolution, the triumphant drama of ordinary people dedicated to fulfilling their vow for kosen-rufu.

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings’ commentary on the “Introduction” chapter begins with a section titled “Point One, regarding the words ‘This is what I heard.’” “This is what I heard” means “I have heard this from the Buddha” and is the opening phrase of the entire Lotus Sutra.

Let's listen to the first passage:

Point One, regarding the words “This is what I heard:”

The word “heard” of “This is what I heard” cannot apply to a person of no faith. But a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra may be said to have “heard” the substance of the doctrine put forth in “This is what,” etc. With regard to this, *Words and Phrases*, volume one, says, “‘This is what,’ etc., are words indicating faith and compliance. Faith means understanding of what one has heard, and compliance means that [one proceeds to follow it as] one follows the path of teacher and disciple.”

In effect, then, Nichiren and his followers are persons to whom the phrase “This is what I heard” may apply. (OTT, 9–10)

Through this passage, President Ikeda explains that the words “This is what I heard” signifies the oneness of mentor and disciple. He says:

The phrase “This is what I heard” also highlights the bonds of unity between Shakyamuni and his disciples. The disciples’ confident assertion “This is what I heard” tells us they have listened to the Buddha’s words with all their beings, taken them to heart, and put them thoroughly into practice. The ‘heard’ of ‘I heard’ indicates the stage of hearing the name and words of the truth; ‘the substance of the doctrine’ is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (OTT, 9). Namely, the essential meaning of “I heard” is “I heard that I am an embodiment of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.”

The passage Ikeda Sensei selected begins: “The word ‘heard’ of ‘This is what I heard’ cannot apply to a person of no faith” (OTT, 9–10). Here, “faith” is not blind faith. Rather, resolving questions and doubts through practice and study, faith is deepened. The lack of faith referred to here is the inability to believe that one’s life embodies the Mystic Law.

In the passage, the Daishonin discusses the path of mentor and disciple. Regarding this, President Ikeda teaches us:

“Faith and compliance” means to live based on the teachings—in other words, to walk the path of mentor and disciple. It is striving to internalize the essence of the mentor’s words and faithfully putting it into practice.

Let’s have a look at the next passage:

Point Two, the matter of Ajnata Kaundinya

Today, when Nichiren and his followers recite the words Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they are illuminating the darkness of birth and death, making it clear, so that the wisdom fire of nirvana may shine forth. And when one understands that the sufferings of birth and death are none other than nirvana, this is what is meant by the words “where there is illumination, darkness cannot arise.” [Again, when Nichiren and his followers recite Nam-myoho-renge-kyo], they are burning the firewood of earthly desires, summoning up the wisdom fire of bodhi or enlightenment. And when one understands that earthly desires are none other than enlightenment, this is what is meant by the words “where there is burning, things [that is, desires] cannot be born.”

In the end, therefore, we see that this Ajnata Kaundinya is showing that for us, the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, earthly desires are enlightenment, and that the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana. (OTT, 10–11)

Ajnata Kaundinya is one of the five ascetics who heard Shakyamuni Buddha’s first sermon and then decided to follow his teachings. Through his example, Nichiren Daishonin discusses the principles that “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana”, and “earthly desires are enlightenment”. In the passage you listened to, the Daishonin compares the wisdom of enlightenment to fire. President Ikeda explains this as follows:

What does this wisdom fire of the Mystic Law burn, and what does it illuminate? It burns the firewood of earthly desires, and it illuminates and dispels the darkness of life’s sufferings by bringing forth the light of our own inherent Buddhahood. That is the meaning of the principles that “earthly desires are enlightenment” (Jpn *bonno*

soku bodai) and “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana” (*shoji soku nehan*) (OTT, 11).

Quoting the second president Josei Toda, Ikeda Sensei teaches us:

Mr. Toda explained: “‘Earthly desires are enlightenment’ and ‘the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana’ describe a life in which we savour a state of happiness and complete peace of mind, even while living and grappling with our earthly desires.” ... No one is free from earthly desires and suffering. In fact, earthly desires and craving motivate us to take action and enable us to savour deep fulfillment in life.

Another important point President Ikeda discusses in the lecture is about the word *are* in “earthly desires are enlightenment” and “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana”. It is a translation of the Japanese word *soku*. In both phrases, it seemingly equates two opposing notions. But *soku* here does not signify a simple or direct equivalence but the principle of change. He says:

The principle of change is inherent in *soku*. When we look at the true nature of life from the perspective of the Buddha’s enlightened wisdom, we see that a life state dominated by earthly desires and the sufferings of birth and death also contains within it the life state of enlightenment and nirvana. In other words, because living beings of the nine worlds all possess the world of Buddhahood, they can transform earthly desires into enlightenment and the sufferings of birth and death into nirvana. This opens the way for the “attainment of Buddhahood in one’s present form” and the “enlightenment of ordinary people.”

President Ikeda further teaches us,

The Lotus Sutra also describes the Buddha as having a “few ills and worries” (see LSOC15, 254). Even the Buddha worries and struggles intensely to guide all living beings to enlightenment. That’s why the Buddha’s wisdom wells forth ceaselessly. Worries and struggles directly become the firewood that generates the wisdom of enlightenment.

Our struggles to realize kosen-rufu and the ideal of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” are equivalent to the noble struggles of the Buddha.

When we pray earnestly and chant with all our hearts, tenaciously tackling the challenges that arise before us, we can create new value by “summoning up the wisdom fire of bodhi or enlightenment” (OTT, 11) in accord with the principle that “earthly desires are enlightenment.” When we make the “wisdom fire of nirvana . . . shine forth” (OTT, 10) according to the principle that “the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana,” we can forge a state of indestructible happiness for ourselves and help others do the same.

This year, SGI Canada Youth division is carrying out the One by One! campaign. This is a time for every one of us to strengthen our bond with our mentor, and “burn with great vow for kosen-rufu” for the sake of people’s happiness. The practice of the phrase “This is what I heard” lies within the advancement of the Soka Gakkai, united by the bonds of mentor and disciple.

I hope you enjoy the lecture and have a wonderful study meeting. Thank you.