

**SGI-UK Study Department
Introductory Study Programme**

History of Nichiren Buddhism

NOTES

Aims of the meeting

For some people, the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin is the first type of Buddhism that they encounter; for others it is only through having tried other forms that they come to hear of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and wish to practise. Nevertheless, most people will have some concept of Buddhism that sticks in their mind. This meeting is not intended to explain the totality of Buddhism but rather to focus on the links between the Buddhism of Shakyamuni, how Nichiren Daishonin established the Buddhism for our age, and how members of SGI are making kosen-rufu a reality.

We hope that everyone attending the many meetings that will be taking place around the country will grasp the following:

- To begin to appreciate that there has been a `flow` or transmission over a period of 3,500 years from Shakyamuni`s Lotus Sutra to the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin which is expressed through the SGI movement;
- Key points in the history of the SGI movement for Kosen rufu

Other Materials

There is an excellent English language translation of the Lotus Sutra, translated by Burton Watson, called *‘The Lotus Sutra’* and published by Columbia University Press. It is available from SGI-UK’s bookshop or via local libraries. However it is important to stress how difficult it is to grasp meaning and significance by reading the text of the sutra.

It is probably best to work up to an attempt to read the sutra itself by reading Daisaku Ikeda’s dialogues on the Lotus Sutra. The SGI-UK bookshop has such dialogues in 4 volumes called *‘The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra’*. These dialogues are also available from the bookshop in 3 volumes called *‘Conversations and Lectures on the Lotus Sutra.’*

Daisaku Ikeda has also written an excellent interpretive biography of Shakymani. It is called *‘The Living Buddha’* and is published by Weatherhill., also available from the SGI-UK bookshop or local libraries. However a short but extremely readable account of the life of Shakyamuni can be found from page 141 of volume 3 of *‘The New Human Revolution’* (available in the bookshop).

Please encourage the participants to start using the Goshō to find answers to questions on Buddhism.

For example, in *On Curing Karmic Disease* [WND p633] Nichiren Daishonin gives two quotes from the Lotus Sutra about its superiority in relation to all the other sutras. And in *Reply to Hisbina Goro Taro* [WND p158] he likens the Lotus Sutra to the ocean, the sun or the highest of all mountains.

In *A Sage and an Unenlightened Man* [WND p107] Nichiren Daishonin gives an account of the enlightenment of Shakyamuni, why he refrained from teaching the Lotus Sutra for the first 40 years of his life, and the significance of the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

In *The Selection of the Time* [WND p543] the Daishonin explains about the middle period of the transmission of the Buddhist teachings between Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin. And later in this writing [WND p547] he gives an account of how Buddhism came to Japan. There is more about Buddhism's entry into Japan in *On Repaying Debts of Gratitude* [WND p702].

These extracts are from the leader of the Soka Gakkai of Japan, Mr Akiya:
“Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, declares, “This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law. . . . I will be the pillar of Japan. I will be the eyes of Japan. I will be the great ship of Japan. This is my vow, and I will never forsake it!” [WND p280-1]. The first three Soka Gakkai presidents made the Daishonin's vow their own and strove to actualize his vision of kosen-rufu. In particular, the strides President Ikeda has made toward achieving that goal are truly without precedent in the history of Buddhism. The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of courageous individuals who have internalized the spirit of their mentor and are taking action with the same determination.” (NL5546)

and

“In all ages and all corners of the globe, there have been all manner of revolutions. Some have succeeded and some have failed. What was it that determined their success or failure? It was whether the movement was supported by the people. Compared with other schools of Buddhism, the reason the SGI has been able to forge a solid global alliance of the people without precedent in the history of Buddhism is that we have placed the utmost importance on life and human existence, society and the family. The SGI district is a castle of the Law for transforming the times; it is a base of friendship and trust whose doors remain open to the community.” (NL4395)

From Daisaku Ikeda's January 2001 New Years message:

“The SGI at last has begun to illuminate the new century with the brilliance of the morning sun - as a ‘pillar’ of peace for humankind, a ‘great ship’ of culture linking people around the world, and the ‘eyes’ of education for global citizenship. The global spread of our kosen-rufu movement is an unprecedented achievement in the history of Buddhism.”