

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

[10] “Emerging from the Earth” Chapter

A Noble Life Dedicated to Fulfilling the Mission of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth

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Hi everyone, and welcome to the study podcast for our March study meetings. This month’s study is about the eternal bonds of mentor and disciple and the realization of our identity as Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

In this essay Sensei is discussing the 15th chapter of the Lotus Sutra – “Emerging from the Earth” as presented in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*.

In the 28 chapters of the Lotus Sutra, the first 14 chapters contain the theoretical teaching, and the latter 14 chapters, the essential teachings. So what is the difference between these two? The first 14 chapters are taught from the perspective of Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment while sitting under the Bodhi tree... while in the latter 14 chapters, the essential teachings, are related from the standpoint of the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past...(in a previous lifetime).

So today’s study is focusing on the first chapter of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra - “Emerging from the Earth” – that is – the 15th chapter.

In this chapter, the bodhisattvas are gathered at the assembly, asking Shakyamuni to entrust them with the mission of propagating the Lotus Sutra in the saha world after his passing... knowing how challenging it would be, and assuming that Shakyamuni would entrust them with this mission.

Shockingly, Shakyamuni declines their offer and tells them that there are bodhisattvas mahasattva as numerous as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers...who will widely preach this sutra after he has entered extinction. (LSOC15, 252)

After Shakyamuni speaks these words, one of the most remarkable scenes in the Lotus Sutra is described as follows:

The earth of all the billion lands of the saha world trembled and split open, and out of it emerged at the same instant immeasurable thousands, ten thousands, millions of bodhisattvas mahasattva... Each one of these bodhisattvas ... brought ... a retinue equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers... They each proceeded to the wonderful treasure tower ... where Many Treasures Thus Come One and Shakyamuni Buddha were [and showed their respect and praise] These bodhisattvas [filled] the sky over immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, and millions of lands. (LSOC15, 252–254).

Shakyamuni, explains that these are his disciples whom he has been teaching since the distant past...

The significance of this is that Shakyamuni is revealing that he did not just attain enlightenment while seated under the Bodhi tree in this existence – but rather, that he had attained enlightenment in the distant past, and that these Bodhisattvas had been his disciples since that time, ready to widely spread the Lotus Sutra after his passing.

All of this is Shakyamuni’s way of teaching us that Buddhahood is inherent in our lives. We are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth - with a very important mission. It is we ordinary human beings who have the responsibility to share this Buddhism now, at this time ... and far into the future.

Let’s listen to the passage from the first half of the section on the “Emerging from the Earth” chapter in *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*.

**[Chapter Fifteen: Emerging from the Earth
One important point]**

Point One, on the passage “Among these bodhisattvas were four leaders. The first was called Superior Practices, the second was called Boundless Practices, the third was called Pure Practices, and the fourth was called Firmly Established Practices. These four bodhisattvas were the foremost leaders and guiding teachers among all the group” [LSOC15, 254].

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: This chapter, “Emerging from the Earth,” is devoted entirely to matters pertaining to the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching, those who were taught and converted by the Buddha in his true identity. The action carried out by the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is referred to in the character *sho* [“advocating” in the compound *shodo*, or “advocating and guiding”]. The character *do* signifies that they will lead and guide all the living beings of the country of Japan to the Pure Land of the Holy Mountain [Eagle Peak]. As for these guiding teachers of the Latter Day of the Law, the term “teachers” can only be applied to the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching. . . .

Nichiren and his followers, who now chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are all followers of [or people counted among] these bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth. (OTT, 117–18)

In this first section, Sensei says, “The action carried out by the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo”. What this means is that all of the actions of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are directed toward spreading the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo... that is to say – only the Bodhisattvas of the Earth chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and help all people to attain Buddhahood in their present lifetime.

The key message in this first section is that it is the function of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and awaken to their own unsurpassed worth and dignity

- to guide others
- to believe in the limitless inner potential of themselves and others, and
- “brimming with compassion, to realize happiness for themselves and others, and
- realize a world in which people can coexist in peace and harmony.”

This is us! We are the Bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth to spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law. Being aware of our identity as Bodhisattvas of the Earth is the fundamental Soka spirit. It is the realization that Josei Toda awakened to while in prison.

Let’s move on to the next part of the Gosho passage.

Again, the Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says that, of all the thousand plants and ten thousand trees in the world, there are none that are not in essence bodhisattvas who emerge from the earth. Thus we may say that the bodhisattvas who emerge from the earth are the bodhisattvas of the essential teaching [those whom the Buddha taught and converted first after his attainment of enlightenment in the remote past]. The word “essential” or “original” represents the merits [or benefits] handed down from the past of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas ago, the merits that are without beginning and without end.

These bodhisattvas are possessors of the essential or original Law. The original Law is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This daimoku, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, is something that is without exception possessed by the bodhisattvas who emerge from the earth, but it is not possessed by the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teaching, those who were taught and converted by the Buddha in his transient status. From the substance of this original Law is derived the function that is propagated as the [Great Teacher T’ien-tai’s] practice of concentration and insight, and is called the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life [which T’ien-t’ai formulated]. In effect, all the explanations given by great and ordinary teachers are directed toward the propagation of this function of the Wonderful Law.

The accepting and upholding of this original Law is expressed in the single word “belief” or “faith.” (OTT, 119)

Sensei explains that “all living things, even plants and trees are expressions of the compassion of the Mystic Law and are, in actuality, Bodhisattvas of the Earth.” This means that all phenomena in the universe inherently possess the workings of compassion.

Furthermore, it states that Bodhisattvas of the Earth are those who have awakened to the mission they inherently possess in their lives. This means that anyone who chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, cherishing all living things, and engaging in compassionate actions to benefit others is a Bodhisattva of the Earth. From this perspective, our kosen-rufu movement is a movement to help people awaken to this realization. By doing so, we bring forth countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth, which leads to the elevation of the life state of society.

Sensei teaches as follows:

The primordial life possessed by all people—which the Daishonin describes as “the utmost depth of the essential nature of phenomena and the ultimate of profound Buddhist principles” (WND-2, 843)—is the true identity of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth... people will bring forth their inherent life state as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, while revering and drawing forth that potential in others.

Toda Sensei often said,

“The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth entrusted by Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, to realize kosen-rufu in the present age, the Latter Day of the Law. It is an organization acting in complete accord with the Buddha’s intent.”

The last sentence in the last excerpt says, “The accepting and upholding of this original Law is expressed in the single word ‘belief’ or ‘faith.’” This boils down to our ability to believe in our own and others’ Buddha nature... and our conviction that all people deserve respect and have a profound mission.

Ultimately, by deepening our faith, we are able to confront and overcome the fundamental darkness in our lives and transform our karma. We are able to awaken to our mission – our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and together with our mentor, to devote our lives to working for the happiness of ourselves and all humanity.

I hope that you haven’t been deterred by the complexity of this month’s study essay. By chanting, and reading and chanting and re-reading, we can better grasp its essence. Our Buddhist study is not an academic pursuit, but a path to deepening our faith and practice. It’s a lifelong endeavour for all of us!

Have a great study meeting! If you have any questions, you can send them to study@sgicanada.org.