Preface

THE Soka Gakkai a few years ago published The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, containing English translations of 172 works by Nichiren Daishonin from the Soka Gakkai publication Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshi (The Complete Works of Nichiren Daishonin). The present work represents volume 2 of the earlier publication and contains English translations of 234 works, bringing the total number of translations to 406. Together, the two volumes contain all of the Daishonin's ten major works, as designated by his immediate successor, Nikkō. Six of these, entitled On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land, The Opening of the Eyes, The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind, The Selection of the Time, On Repaying Debts of Gratitude, and On the Four Stages of Faith and the Five Stages of Practice, were included in the earlier volume. The present volume contains the remaining four, On Reciting the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, Choosing the Heart of the Lotus Sutra, Letter to Shimoyama, and Questions and Answers on the Object of Devotion.

Though written in the context of thirteenth-century Japan, the Daishonin's works shed universally valid light upon the sanctity of life and its boundless potentiality, while rejecting anyone or anything that undervalues or imposes harm upon life. They stress the view that all human beings are potential Buddhas. The Daishonin directs severe criticism at various Buddhist schools that, in his view, pursue some external authority that tends to control people or make them submissive.

The Daishonin affirms the equality of all people, women and men alike. For example, he writes, "These Ten Worlds are born from the mind of the individual and constitute the eighty-four thousand teachings. Here a single individual has been used as an example, but the same thing applies equally to all living beings" (p. 844). He also states, "There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku" (I, p. 385).

A spirit of all-embracing compassion characterizes the life of the Buddha. In his work entitled On Reprimanding Hachiman, the Daishonin states, "The Nirvana Sutra says, 'The varied sufferings that all living beings undergo—all these are the Thus Come One's own sufferings.' And Nichiren declares that the sufferings that all living beings undergo, all springing from this one cause—all these
are Nichiren’s own sufferings” (p. 934). In The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, after citing the same passage from the Nirvana Sutra, the Daishonin is quoted as saying, “Nichiren declares that the varied sufferings that all living beings undergo—all these are Nichiren’s own sufferings” (The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings, p. 138).

As explained in the preface to volume 1, in terms of content, the Daishonin’s works may be classified into four categories: (1) treatises on doctrines, (2) writings remonstrating with government and religious authorities, (3) letters offering advice, encouragement, or consolation to believers, or those answering questions, and (4) writings conveying the Daishonin’s oral teachings. Many of his writings belong to categories (1) and (3), and the present volume contains eleven letters of remonstrance that may be classified under category (2). None of the writings of category (4) are included in this volume. This volume also contains several writings that are in chart or diagram form, such as Diagram of the Five Periods of the Buddha’s Lifetime Teachings and Rooster Diagram of the Five Periods of the Buddha’s Lifetime Teachings. The charts and diagrams employ outline form to provide a quick understanding of the teachings.

Prior to the publication of the present volume, the Soka Gakkai in 2004 published an English translation by Burton Watson of the Ongi kuden under the title The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings. The Ongi kuden was not written by the Daishonin himself, but was completed by Nikkō on the basis of notes on the Daishonin’s lectures on the Lotus Sutra. The translation has therefore not been included in the present volume. This does not imply, however, that it is not of great importance in making clear the Daishonin’s ideas. The Complete Works of Nichiren Daishonin contains four other records of a similar nature that have yet to be translated into English.

For readers who have not read volume 1, we recommend that they read the foreword by Daisaku Ikeda, president of the Soka Gakkai International, and the preface, introduction, and translators’ note that appear at the beginning of that volume.

The appendixes at the back of this volume will provide knowledge that is helpful in understanding the writings. The glossary explains the meanings of Buddhist terms and concepts found in this volume.

In closing, we would like to express our sincere appreciation to Dr. Burton Watson, the translator of The Lotus Sutra and works of Chinese literature, for his continued contribution to the translations in this volume.

The Gosho Translation Committee