

**No. 12** (November 1, 2009)

## **SACRED WORDS**

**The gods in the sky will always serve him who practices the Lotus Sutra in order to hear the Dharma from him.**

The Lotus Sutra Chapter 14

### **Astronauts and the Buddhist Concept of the Universe**

**Rev. Shokai Kanai**

“Mr. Kanai Is the Astronaut Candidate” was the heading on September 9<sup>th</sup> in Rafu Shimpo and Nikkan Sun, two Japanese newspapers in Los Angeles, CA. Nobushige Kanai is my nephew, a son of my immediate younger brother in Japan. According to the articles, he wishes to become a special astronaut, “only a Kanai can do.”

He is a medical doctor in the Japan Self-Defense Forces and has studied medical science for health care of divers in America. He explains, “The divers who stay submerged in the deep ocean for long periods of time, uses just as much time to adjust their bodies before surfacing. Health care for divers must be similar to the effects of space travel and adjusting to gravity.” Currently he is training at a naval base in Florida with 14 other candidates from U.S.A, Canada, and Japan. It may take him at least four years after clearing all training programs to travel into space. We are already excited.

I have no chance to go into space to see the universe; however, when I recite the Lotus Sutra and chant the Sacred Title of the sutra, “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,” I imagine that many Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, deities and ancestors from all the universes appear at the altar.

According to Chapter 7 of the sutra, Great-Universal-Wisdom-Excellence Buddha illuminated great rays of light as brilliant as the sun to five hundred billion Buddha-worlds and beyond the worlds where the rays of the sun do not reach in each of the ten quarters. Thus, heavenly beings in the ten directions wondered “My place has never been illumined so brightly before. Why is that? Did a Buddha appear somewhere in the universe?” Heavenly beings in the ten directions went to find the place from where the light had originated.

The event of emitting a ray of light from the white curls between the eyebrows and illuminates all the corners of worlds from hell to heaven is explained in Chapter 1, 7, 11 and 24 of the Lotus Sutra. In these chapters, hundreds and thousands of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and heavenly beings from all over the universe gather to hear the Dharma at the place where the Buddha illuminates the rays. This event is beyond our comprehension.

Buddhism often uses the term, ‘Three-Thousand-Large-Thousand-Worlds.’ Suppose our solar system is one world, when 1,000 of the solar systems gathered, it is called One-Thousand-Small-Worlds; when 1,000 of the Small-One-Thousand-Worlds gathered, it is called Medium-One-Thousand-Worlds, when another 1,000 of the Medium-One-Thousand-Worlds gathered, it is called Large-One-Thousand-Worlds, that is one billion solar systems. When 3,000 of the Large-One-Thousand-Worlds gathered, it is called ‘Three-Thousand-Large-Thousand-Worlds.’

I wonder how many solar systems we may be able to see with the Hubble Space Telescope. These numbers are not important for our daily lives. It is important for Nichiren Buddhists to image that many Buddhas, deities, bodhisattvas and ancestors come to listen to our recitation of the Lotus Sutra and our chanting of “NAMU MYOHO RENGE KYO.” That is why we read the “Invocation” at the beginning of all services. We are requesting the appearance of all Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Nichiren Shonin and deities. We should not only read the invocation vocally but it is important for us to imagine they are here to listen to our recitation of the Lotus Sutra and chanting of the Odaimoku.

## **Friendship**

**Rev. Douglas Shoda Kanai**

I am sure you have heard the story about your ancestors and how many, many generations of your grandparents needed to meet in order for you to be born. This relationship with your family is very important and shapes who you are. Please respected them and appreciate them every time you are in front of your family altar.

As you pray for your ancestors, please also pray for all the people you have met in your life, both good and bad. These people also shape the way you are. The interactions between people helps develop a sense of being and helps you grow as a person. If your acquaintances are morally corrupt you too may be morally corrupt and end up in trouble.

On the contrary, if you have wonderful, compassionate friends, then you too will be wonderful and compassionate and do good deeds. As you develop your inner Buddha Seed, through practice and prayer, the people you meet also develop their Buddha Seeds.

We could all head to the mountains, find a cave and attain enlightenment, but that is not our purpose. We are all Bodhisattvas, thus we need to share our knowledge to others and learn from them.

Recently I received bad news from a friend. She found a lump in her breast and the first round of testing is inconclusive. She has to return another four times to make sure the correct diagnosis can be made. Hopefully the lump is benign and all is well. In the meantime, she is scared and looking for support. As a friend and also a minister I can read special prayers and dedicate them to her, to aid in her spiritual health so that she can overcome this potential illness and become healthy. When your friends are in trouble, always make time for them and dedicate the Odaimoku to them so that they too can gain the benefits of the power of the Odaimoku.

These friends share with you the joys and happiness as well as the sorrows and disappointments in this life. We cannot go about life on our own; we need to share it with others. This is one of the various meanings of compassion. By sharing our thoughts and feelings, even if we disagree, through respect, we are creating a strong foundation for our Buddha Seed. Seeds cannot grow on parched land. Even with nutrients and water, the seed will only sprout a lame stalk. Love and caring also needs to be added when nurturing the seed. Many people talk to their plants and it does show remarkable growth and health. Thus, we too must nurture our friendships so that our Buddha Seeds can grow together.

Cherish your friends and acquaintances. Respect them. Appreciate them. There will come a time when you are in need of assistance, guidance or prayer. They will be there to support you and make sure you get through safe and sound. When you need a laugh, they will be there to laugh at you and laugh with you. These moments are priceless. I am fortunate to have met so many wonderful people that have enriched my life. I am also flattered when my friends say “thank you” for being supportive and for being an advisor. My compassionate nature automatically does these deeds and it is not until later that I realize the positive impact that I am making. I hope all of you can share in the same experience and be compassionate to all, especially to your close friends.

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