

THE MIDDLE WAY[®]

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SPRING

2012

A Lecture
**The Buddhist Scriptures for
Morning and Evening Gongyo¹ in Nichiren Shoshu²**
Part I
Reverend Raido Hirota
International Meeting
February 26, 2012

The Lotus Sutra³ consists of 28 chapters. In Nichiren Shoshu, we recite chapter 2, the *Hobenbon*, which is the heart of the first 14 chapters of the Lotus Sutra, and are the theoretical teachings. We also recite the 16th chapter, *Nyorai Juryo Hon*, which is the heart of the last half of the Lotus Sutra, and are the essential teachings. Along with that, we chant the Odaimoku⁴ Namumyōhōrengekyō⁵ which is the core of the Lotus Sutra. We chant this repeatedly and this is how it's been practiced since Nichiren Daishonin's day.

The heart of the first part, chapter 2, the *Hobenbon*, explains the absolute equality of Buddha's life and all sentient beings (this includes humans and all other lives). Explaining this concept was unprecedented.

Believer 1 (B1): Please explain what you mean by the word equality? Most people, when they hear the word think or assume it refers to social or intellectual equality. What is this absolute equality that the Buddha refers to?

Reverend Raido Hirota: In the teachings before the Lotus Sutra it was established that criminals or evil people, women and animals could not realize Buddhahood, nor was it recognized that they even had Buddha-nature. However, with the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, those conditions disallowing criminals, women and animals from realizing Buddhahood were eliminated, and it was established that all sentient beings had Buddha-nature and could realize Buddhahood, and thus were equal. That is what is meant by absolute equality.

B1: This means that everyone has Buddha-nature, and can therefore become enlightened. But does it mean that everyone understands equally?

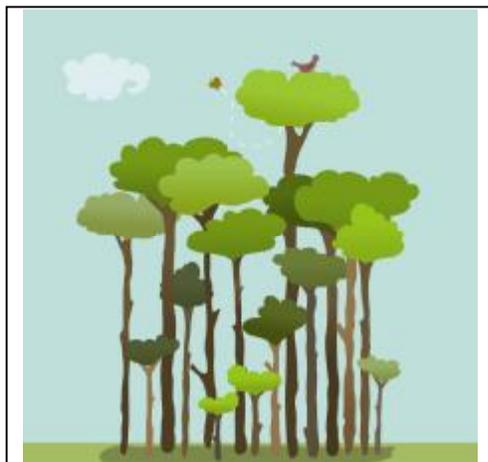
RH: No.

The heart of the last part, the 16th chapter, *Nyorai Juryo Hon* explains the key reason for this absolute equality. It reveals that the essential quality of Buddha's life and all living existence is the Buddha's life of Myōhōrengekyō. The greatest and highest purpose of Buddha's life is for all living things to realize their Buddhahood. With this spirit of the Law, that is attainable. This is what the 16th chapter explains. This is why we recite the Odaimoku Namumyōhōrengekyō (the core of all laws) repeatedly. This repetitive practice reminds us of the message of the Law.

Because Shakyamuni⁶ preached the Lotus Sutra, naturally the public at large believes that Shakyamuni should be considered the object of worship. However, if you read the Lotus Sutra as is, you will see that the first half of the Lotus Sutra (the theoretical teachings (*shakumon*)) is centered on Shakyamuni's life, and the last half of the Lotus Sutra (the essential teachings (*honmon*)) is centered on how Shakyamuni conveyed that his faith was centered around the Odaimoku Namumyōhōrengekyō and how he spread the message. In short, the Lotus Sutra is the teaching that Shakyamuni preached, while at the same time, it's the Law that Shakyamuni realized while he underwent ascetic practices as a human being just like us. It's not Shakyamuni's teachings. So, Nichiren Daishonin didn't consider Shakyamuni as the object of worship. Rather, he realized that the object of worship is centered on Odaimoku Namumyōhōrengekyō. By living as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, anyone can attain Buddhahood. This is the message Nichiren Daishonin⁷ paid attention to, which he found between the lines of the Lotus Sutra. This is what he showed us and how he guided us. If you are going to practice your faith believing that Shakyamuni is the object of worship, you will not attain Buddhahood like Shakyamuni did. Shakyamuni took faith in the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. By doing so, he showed us that you can do that too, and by doing so, you can also realize the Buddha nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō which already resides in you.

Furthermore, chapter 2 (Hobenbon) reads: "*Shoha Shakumon*" (this means, borrow this statement, for from this level of teaching you have a long way to go to attain Buddhahood. Read this to borrow, elevate, show and break).

In other words, the Hobenbon is a part of the Lotus Sutra, but the story conveyed in this chapter is told from the perspective of Shakyamuni as the central figure of the story. The Way (the Law) for all sentient beings reach Buddhahood is not explained in this section. For all creatures who are satisfied with this stage because it's one of the teachings of Shakyamuni, and don't seek any further laws, you can read the Hoben chapter to them and tell them that the teaching is wonderful, but you can't be satisfied with just this. Borrow the concept, read it so that you can break it (by "breaking", I mean "discarding it").



B2: I just wanted confirmation about “breaking” meaning “to discard.” Does that mean to discard old views or old ways of thinking?

RH: When I say “breaking” or “discarding,” it means that the teaching of the Hoben Chapter is wonderful, but this is not the final ultimate teaching that you will be taught for attaining Buddhahood. So don’t get too comfortable at this stage; there is much more for you to learn.

B2: Does that mean to continue to seek the truth in my own life and not become complacent? I shouldn’t have the attitude that I understand this part, so let’s go with this for the rest of my life. There’s going to be more opportunities for me to deepen my faith. Is that right?

RH: I am specifically referring to the Hoben chapter. “Breaking” and “discarding” may be a bit difficult to understand, so here is an example. Imagine a set of stairs or steps. Let’s say there are ten steps to climb. The first two are important. But if you stop at the first or second step, you won’t reach the tenth step. Similarly, with the Lotus Sutra there is a first section and a second section. The first section is great; but the second section is also great. They are both equally important. So you can’t just focus on one part of the teachings.

The 16th chapter, *Nyorai Juryo Hon* reads: “*Shoha Shoyu*” (*Shoha Shoyu*- means that the Lotus Sutra which considers Shakyamuni the protagonist, will fracture. By way of this sutra one is guided to what lies at the foundation of the words, which is that Myōhōrengekyō is the source of all laws. In other words, the sutra tells us that you need to read between the lines because Shakyamuni has imbedded his message in the Lotus Sutra. His message is in between the lines. What is the message? The message is that the foundation of all this is - [myōhōrengekyō]. Also, “Shoyu-“ is a clue that helps us see the message in between the lines. We can say that it’s a process or you can also see it as scaffolding.

B1: Where does *shoha shoyu* appear in the *Juryo* chapter? You say that “Shoyu is a clue that helps us see the message in between the lines.” I’m trying to understand what *shoyu* is. It says it’s the “clue,” but I’m not getting the clue because I don’t know what *shoyu* means.

RH: The 26th High Priest Nichikan Shonin (1665-1726) coined the phrases “*shoha shakumon*” and “*shoha shoyu*” by employing particular *kanji* to describe concepts. In Japanese *shoyu* means something that you possess or own. As I mentioned, *Hobenbon* is something that you break or discard. *Juryohon* is something that you keep. So in using the *kanji* characters of *shoyu*, which means possess or own, in relation to the 16th (*Juryo*) chapter, , *shoyu* becomes the clue to the intent or meaning of the message between the lines in the 16th chapter. It is something you should possess or keep.

Generally speaking, when we think of gongyo, we imagine reciting the scriptures, but actually the core of gongyo is chanting the Odaimoku Namumyōhōrengekyō. Think about it this way: Odaimoku is medicine (*Shogyo*), and the scriptures are the instructions or instruction manual (*Jyogyo*). This instruction manual explains how important Odaimoku is, and gives us the information about the medicine’s ingredients and what they are. It tells us how we are supposed to take that medicine. We,

ordinary people, acquire a grasp of this idea when we are practicing gongyo, but we lose our focus and forget it. Because we forget, we repeat this practice. That's why we practice the same gongyo every morning and evening, so that we will remember this. This is why we continue to practice gongyo every day.

It is important to practice gongyo in a way that everybody can understand your pronunciation and follow your speed no matter who might be listening to you. One might think: "Well, it counts as long as I do it, right?". That kind of attitude doesn't count because you aren't putting your heart into the practice, and you are only doing it out of habit.

Your recitation tempo should be something like a metronome from beginning to end. Maintain smoothness; avoid reading fast in the sections that are easy for you to recite. And the same goes for the sections that are hard to recite. Don't slow down; keep the same rhythm throughout the practice.

RH: Back in the day when everyone was chanting together and there were no microphones, gongyo was chanted in a precise rhythm like a metronome with everyone reading it at the same speed. That's why the shorter words like *myō* have a prolonged or elongated sound, and the longer words like *Sharihotsu* have clipped or shorter sounding syllables.

Avoid getting too caught up with your own voice, or don't expect others to match your tempo. Avoid being selfish, or read so loudly that you can't hear other people's voices. Use 80% of your voice volume. Listen to the voices of others, and match yours to their chanting. Make an effort to practice Gongyo like this.

--The character *myō* on Gohonzon⁸ should be the center of your focus. Keep that in mind when you practice gongyo.

--During your gongyo, do not leave stuff near Gohonzon that could distract you.

--Don't do other stuff while you are practicing gongyo.

--There are people who have memorized gongyo, but nobody has memorized all the words. When practicing gongyo, look straight at the liturgy book so that you will be able to chant it properly.

If you think about it, it's strange that ordinary people like us are chanting to Gohonzon (Buddha) using the same scriptures that Buddha taught to ordinary people. That is "preaching to the choir," literally.

By the time the voice that comes through our throat, tongue, and mouth reaches our ears, the voice reciting the scriptures will be transformed as the teachings of Buddha. It will enter into your ears and will spread through your heart. You are creating the appropriate environment by chanting the scriptures. In other words, you will always approach the teaching place of Buddha, and chant: "The Buddha nature has resided in you since the infinite beginning." Do not lose sight of the spirit of Buddha in you, and live your life appropriately as the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, and be a person who is worthy of hosting the Buddha nature within."

Chant the *Hoben-bon*, *Juryo-hon*, and *Namumyōhōrengekyō*. Listen to them. By doing so, you will become conscious of them, and the root of your faith will grow deeply. This is why we practice Gongyo.

If at all possible, chant Odaimoku for 15 or more minutes. Aim to be conscious of it by physically experiencing Odaimoku at the heart of gongyo.

Myo- ho- ren ge- kyo-.
Ho- ben pon.
Dai ni-.
Ni- ji- se- son.
Ju- san mai.
An jo- ni- ki-.
Go- sharihotsu.

Note:

In writing it is Ho- ben bon. In pronunciation (such as above and in the sutra) it'll be Ho- ben pon.

RH: The correct way to pronounce gongyo is as indicated above. The hyphen indicates that the sound of the vowel preceding the hyphen is supposed to be prolonged or elongated.

There is a saying: “*Uso mo Ho- ben*” (The end justifies the means), but lies and Ho- ben (means) are completely different. Lies are false, while Ho- ben (means) is a teaching. It is a step towards making progress within the True Law. Seeds will not grow unless you first cultivate the field, give nutrition, prepare the soil, and then, finally sow seeds. The process of preparing the soil is the teachings of Ho- ben (the means or the expedient teachings).

[The sutra text above states:], Shakyamuni rose up peaceful and serene from concentration of the mind and spoke to Sharihotsu.⁹

RH: Of *Ju- sanmai* above, *sanmai* means the heart of Namumyōhōrengekyō. In Japanese *sanmai* = *-zanmai* and means a state in which the heart is totally (fully) immersed in something. Whatever you are doing you love so much that you are so completely in that moment – completely present in that moment. In the context of gongyo *sanmai* refers to the heart of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Sho- but[^]chi e-.
Jin jin mu-ryo-.
Go- chi- e- mon.
Nan ge- nan nyu-.

The wisdom of all beings that have attained Buddhahood by way of Namumyōhōrengekyō is so deep that ordinary people can't even begin to measure it. For those ordinary people, finding the entrance to the path of such wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter because for them finding the entrance comes from the place of desire.

B2: I don't understand the sentence, "finding the entrance to the path of such wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter because for them finding the entrance comes from the place of desire." What does it mean "comes from the place of desire?"

RH: To have faith in this teaching means Buddha's thinking, Buddha's message—the teachings—is the center. Having the Buddha's teachings at the center is what it means to have faith in these teachings. So, if you have your own beliefs—for example, Believer 2, if you believe certain things and you come first, and your beliefs are dominant, that is not having faith in these teachings, because you, Believer 2, are at the center. Within that frame of mind, Believer 2 is the main thing. So when it says "coming from the place of desire" it means that your thinking, your preferences, your volition are at the center of your being.

Here's an example: There's a parent and a child. The child wants candy before dinner. The parent says, no you can't have any candy, and gives the reason why the child can't have the candy. But the child doesn't understand the meaning or the reasoning of the parent, because the child doesn't have enough experience or knowledge to understand. The parent could explain it, but feels it's too much work to have to explain the meaning of every little thing every single time. So the parent says, you'll understand it when you get older. For now listen to me and do as I say. Don't have candy. The child then has a choice: he can be totally independent and not listen to his parent; or, even though he doesn't understand why his parent is saying what he says, he will, for now, follow what his parent tells him. The difference here is to either live your life ego-centrally, based solely on whatever you want to do without regard for the lessons of your parents or teacher; or living your life with the teachings of your parents or teacher as your guiding principles, and coming to understand it in time.

Is[^]sai sho-mon.
Hyaku shi- butsu.
Sho- fu- no chi-.

All Shomon (people of learning) (wise men who understand Buddha's teachings by listening to it once) and Engaku (people of realization) (the ones who without listening to the teachings of Buddha, can reach enlightenment by observing the movement of winds, water, or witnessing the changing seasons, plants, and animals) can't even apprehend the enlightenment of this most profound Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Sho- i- sha- ga-
Butsu zō shin gon.
Hyaku sen man noku.
Mu- shu- sho- butsu.
Jin gyō sho- butsu.
Mu- ryo- dō hō.
Yu myō shō jin.
Myō shō fu- mon.

Jō ju- jin jin.
Mi- zo- u- hō.
Zui gi- sho- setsu.
I- shu- nan ge-.

"*Yuen Wa Ikan*" appears many times in the scriptures. It means: "Wherefore" "What is the reason? Why is it like that?" Buddha is teaching us by repeating this teaching many times as if to say: "Do you understand this? Do you get it? This is what it means". It is as if Buddha is checking with us repeatedly to see if we got the point. That's how the Lotus Sutra is taught.

You may be wondering: "Why is it that even *Shomon* (people of learning) and *Engaku* (people of realization) can't understand this?"

Here is the reason: Buddha became close to innumerable and various Buddhas in the past. He had a fellowship with them and practiced in many ways and in many places. He was always courageous, never lazy, nor pretended that he had done his part no matter how hard the practices were. He did that with all his might and without reverting. As a result, his name, Shakyamuni, spread throughout the world. And, he realized and achieved the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō that is so profound and unprecedented. Buddha taught this Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō to all sentient beings by the will of his heart, teaching them in the form of parables about "cause & effect". However, the heart of the Buddha was never understood.

Sharihotsu.
Go- jū jōbutsu i- rai.
Shu- ju- in nen.
Shu- ju- hi- yu-.
Ko- en gon kyō.
Mu- shu- hō ben.
In dō shu- jō.
Ryō ri- sho- jaku.

Sharihotsu, since I have become Buddha, I've used many stories about "cause & effect", various parables, many words to explain countless means to guide all sentient beings so that they will depart from their attachment to living their lives based on their desire.

Sho- i- sha- ga-.
Nyo- rai hō ben.
Chi- ken haramitsu.
Kai i- gu- soku.
Sharihotsu.
Nyo- rai chi- ken.
Kou dai jin non.
Mu- ryō.
Mu- ge-.
Riki.
Mu- sho- i-.
Zen jō.
Ge- das^san mai.
Jin nyu mu- sai.
Jō ju- is^sai.

Mi- zō u- hō.

What is the reason? [Because] Buddha possesses the power to explain the means (Ho- ben), which is the temporary teaching that leads one to the true teachings of Buddha. The ability to see through the true quality and nature of things is called “*Chi- ken haramitsu*”.

This Buddha nature is already in all of us. The Buddha’s ability to see through the true nature of things is broad, vast, profound, and far-reaching and nobody can measure it or obstruct it. When it comes to teaching, he is not afraid of anything. His heart is clear and stable, he can enter into boundless realms of contemplation leading to enlightenment. He attained the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō which was unprecedented, and he attained enlightenment.

B2: I have a question about the word enlightenment. When I was a part of SGI I was told that enlightenment means having a sense of joy and vitality. But now that I’m reading other information on enlightenment, I get the sense that enlightenment means to have an awareness of reality as it is. I need to have a better understanding of what enlightenment means.

RH: *Ichinen Sanzen* is the core of enlightenment. What *ichinen sanzen* means is that there is no such thing as human life because human life consists of all life—water, air, plants, animals (what we eat) and many more minute forms of life. All of these lives become part—or makeup—who we are. All life is connected. All sentient beings are connected. And that principle is called *Myōhōrengekyō*. When you say *ichinen sanzen*—*ichi* means one, and *sanzen* means three thousand. Imagine a fancy folding hand fan. It opens up to become pie-shaped. The center of it is the pivot that holds the fan together. The pivot is *Myōhōrengekyō*. The part that opens up is everything—the universe. The entire fan represents life. That is why all life—all sentient beings—is connected. All life is co-dependent. That principle is *Myōhōrengekyō*; and that, in short, is *ichinen sanzen*, and is the core of everything in this teaching.

The Soka Gakkai says that if you chant *Namumyōhōrengekyō* your vitality will return to you, or you become happy, or you become rich, and when you become healthy, rich and happy that is enlightenment. I say that’s a wrong teaching. If you are born, you are going to eventually die. Accept your life as it is. For example, if one is born with some kind of disease, with the correct teaching that would make the person feel gifted and so glad that he has this life, and that he is alive. But the Soka Gakkai says if you were born with an illness or have a disease, it’s because you’ve done something wrong in a past life. So if you work on it in this life, you’ll come back with a better body or better health in the next life. That’s not enlightenment. Moreover, Nichiren Daishonin never said anything like that in his teachings.

Enlightenment means to live your life as it is. It is the process of recognizing that you have Buddha nature within. Endeavoring to practice this way, your actions are your enlightenment. For example, the plum tree yields plums, and the cherry tree yields cherries. The cherry cannot pretend that it comes from a plum tree, and vice versa. And if you try to do that you create confusion. Enlightenment means that you accept your life as is, and live true to the Daishonin’s teachings that you are learning now.

B1: I had a friend in Taisekiji who hated herself. She hated her body and who she was. She got very sick and went to NST to speak to a priest. The priest told her that should she die, she would be reborn in a better body and have a better life. How did he know that?

RH: Priests who didn't study the teachings correctly will also say such things as if they can predict the future.

In Japan, they have superstitions about certain ages. For men 42 is a bad age, and for women it's 33. So Nichigennyō, Shijo Kingo's wife, wrote to Nichiren Daishonin when she was 33 and said that women at that age became sick and she was afraid. Nichiren responded to her by saying that you can turn the bad luck of 33 into good luck; facing challenges can make you stronger, through that you can learn the importance of living this life. Do not run away from this. By facing difficulty head on, you gain more power and become stronger. It's a gift.

The Soka Gakkai and Taisekiji teach you that if you chant Namumyōhōrengekyō you can avoid or eliminate difficulties and hardships. There is no such teaching or message in Nichiren Daishonin's teachings.

Sharihotsu.

Nyo- rai nō shu- ju- fun betsu.

Gyou ses[^]sho- hō.

Gon ji- nyu nan.

Ek[^]ka- shu- shin.

Sharihotsu.

Shu- yō gon shi-.

Mu- ryou mu- hen.

Mi- zō u-hō.

Bus[^]shitsu jō ju-.

Sharihotsu, Buddha taught the various laws to all sentient beings in many skillful ways so that the teachings would suit each one of them. He spoke softly and peacefully. All creatures that were listening to him became happy. Sharihotsu, Buddha is immense and limitless (it's impossible to measure its amount or distance). Buddha realized the unprecedented Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō entirely, and then attained his Buddhahood.

Shi-sharihotsu.

Fu- shu- bu- setsu.

Sho- i- sha- ga-.

Bus[^]sho- jō ju-.

Dai ichi ke- u-.

Nage- shi- hō.

Yui butsu yo- butsu.

Nai nō ku-jin.

Sharihotsu, there is no need to say more. Because, of all the teachings, the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō is the most rare kind, and is the Law that Buddha realized, and with it attained his Buddhahood. One can't understand this Law with the understanding that stems from the wisdom in all of daily life. Therefore, out of all the laws, look for the True Law that will be the key for you to truthfully attain Buddhahood. Do not mix your own understanding with the teachings of Buddha; and earnestly aspire to attain Buddhahood by believing the teachings of Buddha as they are.

This might be difficult to grasp. The basic concept is that Buddha's Life already resides in all ordinary creatures' lives. For example, say you met a teacher you respected. The teacher is so great that most people gave up thinking that they'd ever be like that teacher. However, people who thought the teacher was the same human being as they, believed that they could be like the teacher, and endeavored to become a teacher like the teacher whom they respected. "Yui butsu yo-but-su" are the people who decidedly want to become Buddha, and believe that they can be Buddha. So they make an effort to pursue their purpose.

Sho- hō jis[^]ō.

Sho- i- sho- hō.

Nyo- ze- s.

Nyo- ze- shō.

Nyo- ze- tai.

No- ze-riki.

Nyo- ze- sa-.

Nyo- ze- in.

Nyo- ze- en.

Nyo- ze- ka-.

Nyo- ze- hō.

Nyo- ze- hon ma[^]aku- kyō tō.

The Reality of all Existence consists of: all the actions of Buddha, and the actions that surface in all sentient beings (*so*/appearance (aspect)); one's nature and personality (*shō*/nature); the body (*tai*); the way one leads his life (and his body), his ability (*riki*/power); action, and all that relates to that action (*sa*/effect (function or influence)); the direct cause that creates a result (*in*/cause); the connection that ties cause and effect (*en*/fate); the result that forms from the accumulation of a variety of stuff (*ka*/result (effect)); and concrete results that depend on each person's life situations, a reward or retribution that might appear, even if your intention was good, some may think it's malicious, or otherwise (*hō*/karma).

Nyoze-sō, Nyoze-shō, Nyoze-tai, Nyoze-riki, Nyoze-sa, Nyoze-in, Nyoze-en, Nyoze-ka, Nyoze-hō—it's called the ten *Nyoze* because there are ten of these aspects which all life possesses. Thus Buddha, all sentient beings, all life are equal. Ultimately, there is total equality. In other words, the ten *nyoze* of rice and flowers, the ten *nyoze* of Buddha, the ten *nyoze* of animals, the ten *nyoze* of all sentient beings these lives and actions are intertwined with each other, and equally support each others' lives, and support each others' existence. The Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō is the heart of this, and ultimately we are all equal.

In Buddhism, therefore, there is no belief that God made this world.

From the beginning of the Hoben chapter to this section of the Ten *Nyoze*, Shakyamuni, who is preaching, is explaining from his vantage point. Buddha (the teacher) understands the concepts, but ordinary people (the practitioners) don't understand this when it was suddenly explained to them. Listening to it was as if they were in a dream. This is why the next section, "Seoge" appears -- so that ordinary people (practitioners) can be carefully taught in a way that they understand this teaching in concrete terms.

B1: You've explained the first nine *nyoze* from *nyoze-so* to *nyoze-ho*. You haven't explained *nyoze-honmakkyotō*. Could you please explain?

RH: *Ichinen sanzen* is a teaching hidden in the depths of the sutra (*montei*)¹, and *nyoze-honmakkyotō* is a literal teaching (*monjo*)². From the Buddha's point of view *nyoze-so* to *nyoze-honmakkyotō* explain *Namumyōhōrengkyō*.

Let me explain. The true equality of everything lies in *ichinen sanzen*. In other words, *ichinen sanzen* is *Namumyōhōrengkyō*. The ten *nyoze* being common to all life, explains how human life, all life—all existence—functions. In other words, it explains what happens within human life and how nature works. All the ten *nyoze*, in a word, is *honmakkyotō*. The meaning of this is hidden in the sutra. The Hoben chapter (chapter 2) is written from the Buddha's perspective. Thus ordinary people can't comprehend it. But when we get to the Juryo chapter (chapter 16), it is written on the level of the practitioner. When you get to the 16th chapter you will understand how to extract the hidden messages, because in its lesson about medicine and instructions it tells us how to really see or understand all of this.

Even if you didn't understand the meaning of Odaimoku, the Lotus Sutra, or a doctor's medicine, the teaching of the Law of *Namumyōhōrengkyō* is correct. This Law is eternal and unchanging. But to deepen your faith and practice, and to respond to people who challenge you about your beliefs, or to teach others about this Law, you need to understand the teachings and the meaning of the Law. This work of studying the sutra and the teachings might be hard, and sometimes you may forget. But it is my hope that you commit yourself to learning the meaning of these teachings and deepen your practice. I hope in the future, you can become the people who can explain and teach others the meaning of the sutra.

1. Montei – means hidden in the depths.
2. Monjo – means literal



ON KECHIMYAKU

Reverend Raido Hirota
International Meeting
December 4-5, 2010

QUESTION: What is the true meaning of *kechimyaku*?

Reverend Raido Hirota (RH): The ninth High Priest Nichiu Shonin¹⁰ explained it. He said that *kechimyaku* is basically the flow of lifeblood. He further explained that it is how people are taught Buddhism: step by step as if it were the flow of blood. The source is the lifeblood of greater life. What that means is that everything that is alive has blood or the same vital source, and it is this collective lifeblood or life essence that flows

Believer 1 (B1): Whose blood is flowing?

RH: It is Nichiren's blood that is the source.

Believer 2 (B2): Is it the blood of Nichiren's spirit, Nichiren's vital source? Is that what you mean?

RH: Yes. It is Nichiren's spirit.

B3: If the high priest today is not the correct high priest, where is the *kechimyaku* today? Since people – you yourself – question the authority of the high priest, where does the *kechimyaku* exist today?

RH: At the time 66th High Priest Nittatsu Shonin passed away, Nikken Abe, the 67th High Priest, had not had a chance to receive all the teachings that he should have received. Nonetheless, he said he received all the teachings. He said that he is authentic. But because there were doubts, he was taken to court. In court he failed to prove his authenticity; he could not prove that he received the teachings. It is even now understood that he is not as authentic as he claims.

B2: Was the court that Nikken appeared before the judicial division of Taiseikiji? Or was it a civil, provincial or federal court?

RH: It was a civil court. A public court.

B3: Where do we find the *kechimyaku* today? If it is not in the head temple, because Nikken Abe was proven to be inauthentic, how do we deal with that concept today?

RH: During the time of Nichiren Daishonin, through the time of Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin it was not believed that successive high priests were or would be the reincarnation of Nichiren Daishonin. But as generations passed, people started saying that the high priest was the reincarnation of Nichiren. The thought of elevating high priests to the status of living Buddha was assimilated into the belief sometime during the Edo Period (1603-1868) because it was convenient for them to conduct an organization that way during that time. Then they started assigning a different meaning to *kechimyaku*, defining *kechimyaku* as if it was only emanating from the one person who held the position of high priest, and that one person was the only teacher. But Nichiren Daishonin's original teaching is founded on the Lotus Sutra. Its basic premise is that all sentient beings are imperfect common mortals, and that everyone—everything—has Buddha within them. So within this belief, it's impossible for a special Living Buddha to exist. *Kechimyaku* is really people's belief in the teachings. It is not that *kechimyaku* is only coming from the words of the teachers. For example, if you were to say the high priest is the heart of a person, and believers who practice the religion are the hands and legs, the hands and legs cannot operate on their own. And likewise, the heart needs other body parts to be a body. The blood flows from the heart. It goes out to the different parts of the body, then flows back to the heart. All the parts make one body – one unit -- oneness.

B2: In other words, you are saying that *kechimyaku* is faith. Is that right?

RH: Yes. That's it.

Q & A
With Reverend Raido Hirota
International Meeting
December 2010

QUESTION: Is Namumyōhōrengekyō supposed to be realized at a scientific, social, and spiritual level, or is it just supposed to be a spiritual thing?

RH: Just because you have faith, or are practicing this religion, doesn't mean that the social and spiritual levels are taken care of. The religion is connected to the fundamental nature of human beings—the way that we are—but that is that, and if you want to pursue or gain knowledge in other areas you have to separate this religion from other disciplines and pursue that route. Just because you believe in this Buddhism or have faith, doesn't mean that you can be superhuman.

B2: Does Namumyōhōrengekyō exist in the fields of science—in the scientific field, or in the social realm, or is it just on a spiritual level? That is, is it functional or operating within science? Is it functioning or operating within society? Or does it only exist on a spiritual level?

RH: During the Kamakura era (1185-1333) Nichiren Daishonin wrote the Rissho Ankoku Ron, in which he said if you do not have faith in the Lotus Sutra there will be no peace in the land. He also said that if you don't have faith, there will be issues with governance, and it would not be good. He spoke in generalities. The Daishonin didn't give specific instructions, such as do this or do that; build this bridge here, etc. He did not suggest any specific political actions or strategies to take. But what he did talk about was that each person had to have the right faith in their heart. Otherwise things don't work well. So, in that sense, the basis of faith is realized in the scientific, social and spiritual realms. But it is not realized in the details.

For example, suppose there are two doctors. One has faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō and the other does not. Let's say the doctor who has faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō is not as good as the doctor who does not have faith. If I were to have an operation, I would choose the doctor who doesn't have faith but is the better doctor.

Just because you have faith doesn't mean that everything is going to be alright. You have this faith, but you also have to try to learn to make things happen.

QUESTION: I'm trying to get my 14 year old daughter to take faith and start to do Gongyo and to chant Daimoku. When she was younger, we would chant together occasionally. Now when I ask her, she will not chant at all. As a typical teenager, she has had her share of problems and sufferings. She was hit by a car last year, and broke her leg. She also suffers from migraine headaches. She seems to be sad often, but does not want to talk about it. It hurts me, as her Father, to see her suffer when I know that her life would improve if she practiced Buddhism. I send Daimoku to her, chanting for her enlightenment, but it does not seem to be working. What advice can you give me? I feel responsible for my child. What can I do?

RH: The following is true not only for children, but when you talk about this belief, I wish all of you will keep these three points in mind:

1. Don't be persistent

2. Don't be intrusive
3. Let the other person know that you are always available to help.

If the other person does not feel comfortable talking about it, let them know that they can write letters and memos, or that you can do the same. Let them know that you can write a letter to her.

Also, don't say that if you chant Odaimoku your problems will be solved. Tell the other person that they have power within them, and they can harness that power and use it in the best way possible from within them. Tell them that by chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō they can acquire the key to open that spirit or power. That is what you should tell someone. Even Japanese parents tell their kids if you chant Namumyōhōrengekyō you can run faster, or you're going to be more intelligent. I say, don't say that. Don't tell your kids that, because even if you chant Namumyōhōrengekyō, if you don't study, you're not going to do well in school. Just because you chant Namumyōhōrengekyō doesn't mean you're going to build muscles. If you chant Namumyōhōrengekyō but don't exert any effort towards what you want to accomplish, you can't manifest what it is you want or make happen, because there's nothing there. For instance, if you're a student, you have to study. You have to make an effort to get the desired result. Just because you chant Namumyōhōrengekyō, if you haven't studied, whatever it is you have to know or have to remember is not going to come to you.

QUESTION: In the 3rd prayer it says that Nichiren Daishonin, who is the true Buddha, has the three attributes of parent, teacher and sovereign. Do we also develop the same attributes? Or are they different than Daishonin's attributes?

RH: For us, we can be a teacher, a parent and sovereign for some people within our lives. But for Daishonin it is different. The scale is different. His role as parent, teacher and sovereign is for all people, whereas for people like us, the circle of influence is smaller. It's not for everyone. In that sense, yes, it is different.

B2: So what you're saying is that in our lives we can be a parent to a child, a teacher to other people, and a sovereign or boss, president, etc. to others. We are different things to different people. But Daishonin is all of those things to everyone. Is that right?

RH: Yes. And though the scale is different and smaller than the Daishonin's, we all have a role to play, and must play. Having Namumyōhōrengekyō in the center of the practice, you play that role the best way that you can. Just because the scale of influence and responsibility is bigger or smaller, doesn't mean that one is better or worse.

B2: So you're saying that though our scale is smaller, or our influence is less than the Daishonin's, we are not less of a being?

RH: Yes. That's right. It's all the same Namumyōhōrengekyō.

QUESTION: Nichiren Daishonin says, "Do not stay in the seat of honor too long." He also says do not begrudge your life." These are conflicting statements. If one is exhausted, when should one step down from the seat of honor? Or should one fight on, not begrudging one's life for the sake of the Law?

RH: I am a priest. You are the captains. I don't dictate to you. I don't tell you what to do. And I don't think that's the right thing to do. A leader can make mistakes. A leader is a guide. When he is

lost, or doesn't have anything to refer to from his past experiences, he will ask for advice. I don't believe in the attitude that you should follow me. The purpose of this practice is to realize Buddhahood within each of us. Nichiren Daishonin's teaching is *eho fuinin* – follow the Law, not the person. Do not base your actions on pride or what you consider useful or not, choose, as I do, the path that will lead everyone to Buddhahood. When I choose to hand the baton to the next leader because of old age or declining energy, I believe I must choose a new leader who believes in and follows the principle of *eho fuinin* – follow the Law, not the person.

In the SGI they think they are following Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, but they are actually following Daisaku Ikeda's opinions. Taiseikiji only follows what is suitable or expedient for a given time period, but clearly they are not following Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. When Daisaku Ikeda passes away SGI believers will really have to question what their core belief is, or whether they are really following the teachings of Nichiren, which is to follow the Law, not the person. And they will have to do serious self-reflection, looking at where they are with their belief.

We too have to always check to see if we are following the Law and not the person. We must make sure that following the Law and not the person is always at the core of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's teachings.

B3: What does the Daishonin mean by “the seat of honor”?

RH: The “seat of honor” refers to high position of status. When it says “do not stay in the seat of honor too long,” that means that if a priest forgets where he comes from and what his purpose is, then that person should remove himself from that position of honor, because everyone is the same in terms of having Buddha nature and being eligible to have the capacity, the desire and the will to realize Buddhahood. If a priest forgets that and becomes so full of pride that he forgets his purpose, then that person should not be a priest who teaches other people. Let's take a school teacher for example. If the person teaching becomes too full of himself and is totally self-absorbed, then that person should not be teaching. That's what it means when Nichiren Daishonin says “do not stay in the seat of honor too long.”

GOSHO SELECTION

“On Polished Wheat”¹¹

I HAVE received the sack of polished barley, the sack of polished wheat, and the five packets of river nori that you were kind enough to send.

The Venerable Aniruddha, a disciple of the Buddha, in his youth bore the name At Will. He was called At Will because he could cause to rain down any manner of treasures that his heart desired. If one asked the Buddha why he was born with such power, the Buddha would reply that it was because, long ago, in a time of famine, Aniruddha had presented a humble meal of millet as an offering to a sage who was a cause-awakened one.¹²

The Venerable Mahakashyapa was the most outstanding monk in all Jambudvīpa,¹³ second only to the Buddha himself. When he was still a layman, he was very rich, possessing sixty storehouses, each stocked with 140 measures of gold, and his other treasures were beyond description. If one asked the Buddha about Mahakashyapa's past existences, the Buddha would explain that, in a time of famine, he had made an offering of a bowl of cooked wheat [to a pratyekabuddha¹⁴]. As a result, he was reborn a thousand times in the heaven of the thirty-three gods, and now has encountered Shakyamuni Buddha and become first among all the monks. In the Lotus Sutra it is said that he will become a Buddha named Light Bright Thus Come One. All this is recorded in volume one of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai's¹⁵ *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* (Hokke Mongu).

Comparing these examples with what you yourself have done, could anyone imagine that the Venerable Mahakashyapa's offering of a bowl of wheat was so wonderful that it entitled him to become Light Bright Thus Come One, but that the offering I have now received from this lay supporter of mine is too paltry to merit the reward of Buddhahood? The moon when the Buddha was in the world is today the same moon, the flowers are today the same flowers, and the benefits resulting from meritorious acts in past ages are benefits today.

Moreover, I am a votary of the Lotus Sutra, hated by all, from the supreme ruler down to the masses of common people and forced to face starvation and death here in these mountains. And because you pity me, out of your kindness you have sent this offering, conveying it over mountains and rivers this wheat that is not wheat but gold, not gold but the words and letters of the Lotus Sutra. In our eyes it is wheat, but to the ten demon daughters¹⁶ this wheat appears as the seeds of Buddhahood!

Aniruddha's meal of millet changed and became a hare, then the hare changed and became a dead man, the dead man changed and became gold. Whenever Aniruddha pulled off one of the [golden man's] fingers and sold it, a new finger would appear, and when the ruler tried to seize the gold it changed once more into a dead man. And so this fortune continued for the space of ninety-one kalpas.

When a man named Mahanama¹⁷ picked up stones, they turned to gold, and King Golden Grains could turn grains of sand into gold. And now this wheat of yours has become the words and letters of the Lotus Sutra. Or again it may become a mirror for a woman to use to adorn herself, and for a man it may become armor and a helmet, or it may become a guardian deity who will make you foremost among the wielders of bow and arrow. Namumyōhōrengekyō, Namumyōhōrengekyō!

POSTSCRIPT:

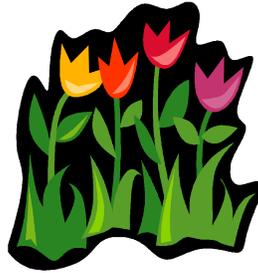
When things are going smoothly in the world of ours, we suppose there is nothing to worry about, but these days the situation seems very threatening indeed. Whatever happens, however, you must not despair. Be firm in your approach, and if things should not go as you wish with regard to your lands, then determine to be more contented than ever, adopt an attitude of indifference, and if you like, come here. There are a great many people nowadays who cannot keep possession of their lands. Think of how grievous it must be for those who these days have to set off for Tsukushi!¹⁸ And all of this comes about because the authorities treat me with disdain.

With my deep respect.
The second day of the seventh month

Nichiren

Reply to Nanjo.

Happy Spring!



The Middle Way

Is published by
Udumbara Foundation

Website: www.udumbarafoundation.org

E-mail: ufound@yahoo.com



Advisor: Reverend Raido Hirota
Founder and Editor-in-Chief: Peach Pair
In this issue: Translators: Junko Hokari
Editor: Art Shapiro

¹ Gongyo – the recitation of chapter 2 and chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra.

² Nichiren Shoshu – the sect of Japanese Buddhism that believes in the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* and Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

³ Lotus Sutra – the highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha taught in the last eight years of his life.

⁴ Odaimoku – chanting *Namumyōhōrengekyō*.

⁵ *Namumyōhōrengekyō* – the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe, the Buddha-nature in all things.

⁶ Shakyamuni – Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE – 949 BCE), the historical found of Buddhism.

⁷ Nichiren Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

⁸ Gohonzon – the scroll that is the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, representing the universal Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* and the Buddha nature in all things.

⁹ Sharihotsu - aka. Sariputra. - one of the chief disciples of Buddha.

¹⁰ Nichiu Shoshu – (1409-1482) – he 9th high priest of Nichiren Shoshu. He is revered for restoring the Head Temple, which had declined during a 70 year land dispute, systematizing the observances and rituals of the Fuji School, and doing wide spread shakubuku in northern Japan.

¹¹ *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. II, pp. 575-576

¹² Cause-awakened one – (Jp. *Engaku*) (Skt. *Pratyekabuddha*) – Men of Realization –those disciples of the Buddha who were enlightened to causal relationships or perceived the law of impermanence by observing natural phenomena.

¹³ Jambudvipa – according to the ancient Indian world view it is one of the four continents surrounding Mt. Sumeru, where people are less happy than in the other three continents, because this continent is populated by people with bad karma. It is here that Buddhism appears and spreads.

¹⁴ Pratyekabuddha – see Cause-awakened one above

¹⁵ T'ien-t'ai – (538-597) a Chinese Buddhist scholar who made a theoretical categorization of Shakyamuni's teachings and founded a Chinese school of Buddhism that recognized the Lotus Sutra as a superior teaching.

¹⁶ Ten demon daughters – (also known as the ten goddesses) he daughters of Kishibojin, who in chapter 26 of the Lotus Sutra they vowed to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

¹⁷ Mahanama – one of the five men ordered by Shakyamuni's father, the king, to become monks and accompany his son when he left the palace to pursue a religious life.

¹⁸ Tsukushi – an ancient name used for the southern most major island in the Japanese archipelago, now known as Kyushu.