

THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SUMMER

2012

ON ILLNESS AND OBSTACLES

Reverend Raidō Hirota
International Meeting
June 2011



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The Middle Way

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QUESTION: My aunt was just found to have lung cancer on Friday, as well as lesions on her liver. It is in stage 4 as of now. We are not sure if the lesions are cancerous, they probably are. In response to this, family members have set up prayer groups with different Christian churches and I am very troubled by this. What could I possibly do being the only one that practices Buddhism in my family? My aunt is not religious however, so there can be something done there. What should my mindset be when chanting on this matter?

Reverend Raido Hirota (RH): My heart goes out to your aunt and family for facing this unbearable sorrow. The inevitable stages of human life—birth, aging, sickness, and death—come upon us unexpectedly as if we were suddenly punched in the dark, doesn't it? We feel anxious, suffer from profound despair, and run about in confusion because we can't seem to find a good answer. We think we have braced ourselves for this, but when the time comes, our defenses are gone. That's what it is to be human. We are all vulnerable.

Is your aunt feeling uneasy and scared? Or is she in a state of relative calm?

Believer 1 (B1): She's undergoing chemotherapy treatments, and she's back at work. I'm hoping that the chemotherapy does its job.

RH: That's good news.

In the state of uncertainty, your aunt is facing sickness and death without having anything to rely on in her heart. She might be feeling very uneasy and scared. I suggest that you tell her to chant Namumyōhōrengekyō.¹

Namumyōhōrengekyō is the only teaching which explains that all sentient beings have the same life as Buddha. People make the assertion that they have rights, but they all have forgotten that there is something more important and sacred. That is the right to be Buddha; our capacity to realize Buddhahood. They die without knowing their own intrinsic sacredness. They are feeling lost.

It's okay if your aunt does not understand what Namumyōhōrengekyō means. If she doesn't have anything that can be an anchor in her heart, please tell her that it'll be good to chant Namumyōhōrengekyō. It's not because the disease will be cured, but because she can tear away the darkness of unease which blocks the eternal life's journey. If she gets confused when you try to teach her about the Law, then you can chant and pray: "I hope my aunt can bond with Namumyōhōrengekyō's teaching." Do that in your heart on your own.

Even people, who had a life of faith, can lose their physical strength and will be in a twilight state right before their death. Nichikan Shonin² wrote that you should whisper in the person's ear and quietly chant Namumyōhōrengekyō for the person who may not be conscious.

Instead of cheering up your aunt by saying something like "let's go and get something tasty to eat when you get better," or, "Let's go travel when you get better" (which would be lies if you consider the age and medical condition of the person), you can give her time to take a look at the uneasiness straight in the eye, and let her think about what life is. That is the most precious thing that you can do under the circumstances.

QUESTION: Why is it that a person who practices sincerely is beset by great illness and difficulty?

RH: Even though one has faith, one cannot escape the four phases of life: birth, old age, sickness, and death. The Soka Gakkai³ teaches that it is proof of correct practice when one can escape birth, old age, sickness, and death. To the contrary, True Buddhism teaches that peace of mind, purity, and strength which comes from living the true Law correctly — despite whatever suffering or sickness one may be experiencing — is the happiness which is said to be the great joy of true faith. Suffering does not deepen for the purpose of faith. That is not the reason or the goal. But I do think that you will encounter painful experiences the more you try to attain and correctly follow the teachings of true faith. For people who do not believe, there is not much pain. And while there is relative tranquility for people who do not believe this faith, and unforgivable and unbearable things happen to people who do believe, there is a big difference between thinking that suffering has deepened, and thinking that this suffering is a trial for attaining a faith that is realized through practice. There is a Buddhist concept called "changing poison into medicine" (*hen doku i yaku*). Do not think of the poisons of worries, suffering, and sickness—what are known as obstacles—only as minuses. Through faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō you can change these poisons into the plus or positive medicines of being tested and deepening practice.

¹ Namumyōhōrengekyō – the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

² Nichikan Shonin – (1665-1726) 26th high priest of Nichiren Shoshu.

³ Soka Gakkai – SGI – a lay organization that wrongly uses some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism within its own philosophy and practice.

Changing poison into medicine means that through faith in Namumyōhōrengkyō we must change all the poisons that occur in our bodies to practice, which is medicine, and faith into enlightenment.

***KAIMYO* – BUDDHIST NAME**

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

June 2011

QUESTION: What happens if a believer in the USA has a wedding or a funeral? Do you come to officiate?

RH: Yes, I've been doing that.

B2: Rev. Hirota married me and my husband. He did it during a regular visit. We set our date to accord with his scheduled visit.

B4: Weddings are more predictable than funerals.

RH: You're right. You can't plan your funeral. I'm very sorry that I cannot just fly right away to the States or wherever the person lived when someone passes away. But at the time of my next regular visit I will perform a memorial ceremony so that that person can rest in peace.

B2: What has happened in the past is that Rev. Hirota has had us believers conduct a service immediately following a death. Then when Rev. Hirota comes to the States he performs a proper memorial ceremony.

RH: When someone passes away, one of you will contact me and let me know the date and time of the funeral. Then I will do a service for the deceased on the day and at that time too. Then when I come to the States, believers and family members of the deceased will gather and we will chant for that person.

There is something that I have been thinking about for thirty years now. When a Buddhist passes away, there is Buddhist name that is given to that person. *Kaimyo* or Buddhist name is a posthumous name bestowed after one leaves the body. If the person is Japanese, the name will be written in *kanji* (Japanese characters). But if the person is not Japanese and cannot read Japanese, the name will have to be explained. Each Buddhist name has a meaning. But without the knowledge of the language it will be difficult to understand the real meaning. So for anyone who wants to receive a Buddhist name after death, I will choose one for you, and will use that new name when I chant for you at a memorial service. But if the person doesn't specifically ask for a Buddhist name, I will just use your given name in this life.

How do you feel about it?

B2: It's interesting. Shijo Kingo's⁴ wife had a Buddhist name, Nichigennyō. Did Nichiren Daishonin⁵ give her that name before she died? He must have, because she died after him. Nichiren Daishonin always referred to her by her Buddhist name. I would like to know the significance of having a Buddhist name.

RH: The Buddhist name (*kaimyo*) is a moral name. It is a name that indicates how one lives or lived his life as a Buddhist practitioner. Priests receive their Buddhist names from their teachers. At the start of this religion lay believers were given a Buddhist name when they joined the religion. But too often there were people who changed their heart, saying I joined but this doesn't really work or doesn't suit me, so I'm leaving. There were so many people who did that, that the religion stopped giving Buddhist names to lay believers. Bestowing to just anybody who joined lessened the value of the meaning and purpose of the name. So now, believers are given the name upon their death, which indicates that this person lived his life as a practitioner. The name given after death describes how the person lived. That is why the name is given at death.

B2: So what does your name, Raidō, mean? It's a Buddhist name.

RH: *Rai* (of Raidō means to rely on, count on, or dependability. *Dō* (of Raidō) means the path of. So Raidō means, "I am counting on you or depending on you to spread the teachings." I think the name is much bigger than what I actually do.

So the meaning of a Buddhist name suggests the values with which one lived his or her life or, in the case of priests, how one will live his or her life as a practitioner.

If anyone wants a Buddhist name, please let me know so that I will have one prepared when it is time.

B2: What is surprising to me is how much the human condition has deteriorated. The Daishonin felt confident in giving believers Buddhist names. Now we have to wait until we're dead to get one because we are so degenerate that we can't hold on to our beliefs. We've really declined very quickly as human beings.

RH: Precisely.

B4: I think the conditions in the world at the time of Nichiren Daishonin, Shijo Kingo and his wife were different. There was persecution going on, and one really had to stand up for his faith. But nowadays, it's easy to go from one church to another and one sect of Buddhism to another. And people don't really understand the significance of the faith. It's more social than actual belief.

RH: To have faith and to practice this Buddhist faith is to change your way of life. But these days there are so many distractions—so many things one can do and play with. You have to feel that this is my way of life that I have chosen, and I'm going to stick with it. That is definitely the difference in natures between people today and people back in Nichiren Daishonin's day. The point I want to make is this: To believe—to have faith—is a way of life.

⁴ Shijo Kingo – (1230-1300) Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Zaemon-no-jo Yorimoto – a samurai and devout follower of Nichiren Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namumyōhōrebgekyō imbedded deep in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

⁵ Nichiren Daishonin



THE BUDDHIST VIEW OF WOMEN

Reverend Raidō Hirota
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QUESTION: What is the Buddhist view of women? Women's role in society, cultural life, and protection of mothers in the workplace?

RH: In "Kyodai Sho"(Letter to the Brothers), Nichiren Daishonin says "Women support others and thereby cause others to support them. When a husband is happy, his wife will be fulfilled. If a husband is a thief, his wife will become one, too. "

The world's history is a chain of violent events. You could say it's a history of bullying. Because many men have more physical power than women, this world decided to look down on women, and had women do necessary but troublesome work such as cleaning, doing laundry, and cooking. Men have delegated homemaking to women who had to spend time on having babies and raising them, while men thought about the world and the nation's politics. What an unbalanced, paradoxical, arbitrary system that is. That's how we've been living for years upon years.

The Kamakura Period (1185-1333) was the era in which Nichiren Daishonin lived. Women were in a socially vulnerable position during those times. However, Nichiren Daishonin expressed an idea on gender discrimination that was very unconventional at the time.

He said that women might act as if they are less than their husbands in this world, but women have solid thinking and judgment and they lead their husbands and children in this world. Women are not things that belong to something: "If her husband was a thief, she'd become a thief." She has to determine what is right or what is wrong. She has to have the courage to advocate her decision and act upon it. Even if the husband doesn't practice this faith, she will have to stay on the path of devotion no matter how many objections she might encounter.

I've touched on this point before. You can see in the Gosho⁶ that Nichiren Daishonin followed the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. He saw that all people have potential to attain the life of Buddha which is beyond the discrimination that affects human rights and women's rights.

I don't know how it is in the U.S. and in Europe, but in Japan there is a tendency for society on the whole to point the finger at women, blaming them for all its woes. In Japan there is gender discrimination and bullying, putting women down, not taking them seriously, not looking at them as equals. Nichiren Daishonin, as expressed in his teachings, is really looking at people as people. Everything that has life is equal. There should be no discrimination between men and women.

⁶ Gosho – the writings of Nichiren Daishonin

B2: I think many people who aren't Buddhist, I've heard from people who had been SGI members and left, say that women were patronized in Buddhism. Because all the Buddhas were men, and because people read pre-Lotus Sutra teachings which state that women cannot become enlightened, they believe that women are inferior. The sutra says that a woman would have to become a man in order to become enlightened. This is what I've heard from women who left Buddhism and joined feminist oriented spiritual groups. They didn't understand this Buddhism. And there was gender discrimination within SGI.

RH: Gender discrimination exists within Soka Gakkai, but it doesn't exist within Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism—within Nichiren's teachings. I hope there is no misunderstanding on this point.

B4: My experience with the Soka Gakkai was that there were many things that were culturally Japanese and not necessarily Buddhist that were passed on to us as being authentically Buddhist.

RH: Yes, the Soka Gakkai was colored by the Japanese culture. But the culture of any organization depends on the individual membership. For example, the attitude towards women today in Japan is an improvement over what it was 50 years ago. So it depends on the individual members of any group and their personal attitudes and prejudices that determine the culture of a group. If a former SGI member feels that women are not equal—that men are superior to women—they could say that attitude is the result of the influence of Japanese culture. But is it really? It seems more like a culture of bullying than Japanese culture. I'm stronger than you are. We're going to control this world. Or I'm going to control this household. You're weak—physically or otherwise—so you take care of the tedious chores. You don't have the right to change anything; you have to follow orders. These attitudes are not specific to one culture or country. This is something practiced throughout the world.

B4: I don't want to bash Japanese culture solely. I agree with you, Rev. Hirota. It can be the way individuals have been raised and have interpreted Buddhism. There are many different factors. My point was that some of the things that were passed on to us as being authentically Buddhist, were culturally biased and had nothing to do with Buddhism, regardless of what culture they got it from.

RH: I agree with you. The teachings can be correct and true, but if the person doesn't practice it, there's no point.

B2: I think that there is also a problem in having lay people teach and propagate a religion in which they do not have any significant background of study. Because what they bring to it is their own prejudice and a meager understanding and superimpose it on Buddhist teachings, and articulate it as Buddhism. People are learning wrong teachings. This is especially harmful for new people, because they are learning a biased and adulterated view based on someone's personal preferences and prejudices.

RH: When you have questions, direct those questions to me, directly. Then I will tell you what the Daishonin said, or what the Daishonin's message was. Then you will be able to understand it, and take the teachings into your heart, and use them as the guidelines for your life. It is my hope that this is how all of you will practice this Buddhism.

B4: The reason I continue to come to these meetings is because what Rev. Hirota is telling us sounds to me like the authentic teaching of Nichiren Daishonin verses the other Nichiren sects and

groups, who all say things that sound suspicious to me, and that do not come from Daishonin, but from the person who is talking.

FOUR REALIZATIONS

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

June 2011



QUESTION: Explain the concept of the “Four Realizations.”

RH: 1. [*Shaku*] – the first principle realization – strongly assert and explain to both people who understand and people who do not understand that there is only the one true Law of

Namumyōhōrengekyō.

2. [*Buku*] – the earthly desires realization – you are mistaken that there is help for you in your religion concerning this.

3. [*Sho*] – the temperament realization – explain the Law with consideration of the characteristics and capabilities of each individual person.

4. [*Ju*] – the world realization

In propagating this religion I think it is ideal to proceed from bottom to top, that is, 4, 3, 2, 1. But to stop at 4 and 3 and think that they are sufficient, are not the faithful activities of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. It is not faithful to pray in secret. Can a person really be saved with the religious teachings they currently hold? Make them doubt, make them think. Exposing the problems is *shakabuku*.

Nichiren Daishonin indicated that the age of the Latter Day of the Law⁷ would be the age when only *shakabuku*⁸ would work. Awaken many people to the voice of Namumyōhōrengekyō, the teaching of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Create a karmic relation with the people and Namumyōhōrengekyō, and awaken people to the fact that they themselves, and everyone, has the Buddha life of Namumyōhōrengekyō within them. This is the responsibility and mission of everyone who has already awakened to the true teachings.

Even though a person is opposed to the teaching and becomes angry, the anger will activate (arouse, cause) the Buddha seed within the person’s heart to ache, and eventually from that seed a sprout will grow. [This is known as the “poison drum” or reverse relationship in Buddhism.] A person who becomes angry when he or she hears about Namumyōhōrengekyō and does not immediately awaken and take faith, will awaken to your words after having heard from a number of people 1 year from now, 10 years from now, 100 years from now, after one or more births and deaths. Gradually, the

⁷ The Latter Day of the Law – (Mappo) the present age which began in 1052, 2000 years after Shakyamuni’s death. It is the predicted evil age when the true Law of Buddhism will flourish.

⁸ Shakabuku – a method of propagating Buddhism by directly leading a person to the True Law and refuting erroneous views.

person will come to know the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō, and a believer will emerge. (Of course, there are countries in the world today, where Namumyōhōrengekyō cannot be spoken of directly.) The most important thing is to make the karmic connection to Namumyōhōrengekyō. Increasing the number of believers is not the objective. Of course, there would be no greater joy than if, while we are alive, there was an increase in believers who suddenly awakened to the truth in the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, and that they made others aware, and so on, and we all believe together. But even if our numbers increase, we do not want to be like the Soka Gakkai. We do not want to create a group that has mistaken understanding and misguided activities. No matter the myriad of times they chant the *daimoku*⁹ of Namumyōhōrengekyō, they will end up as human beings who cannot perceive the seed of the Buddha of Namumyōhōrengekyō. They cannot attain enlightenment.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

With Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

June 2011 / April 2012

QUESTION: I like to read and study the Goshō. The option for English translations is limited. I have not been able to find any of the old Nichiren Shoshu translations that I remember from 30 years ago. Are they available through you or is reading the Goshō in another edition, say the Nichiren Shu English editions, acceptable?

RH: I don't know about the English version of Nichiren Shu, so I can't judge that. In Nichiren Shu, Shakyamuni is considered the Buddha and is the object of worship. In Nichiren Shoshu, Nichiren Daishonin is Buddha, and only Namumyōhōrengekyō is the object of worship.

If this point is confused, you should stop reading it. Reading the Goshō is different from reading a book. You should read the same Goshō hundreds of times. Depending on your age, or your environment, there will be fresh discoveries every time you read it. Gradually, you will feel something; notice something that didn't catch your attention the first time you read it. At first, you might be reading the Goshō from your personal point of view and trying to understand it. Eventually you'll be able to read it from Nichiren Daishonin's point of view, and imagine what it was like for believers who received the letter. That's how I read it, too. Please don't think that gathering information is devotion or faith.

B2: The Gakkai has diluted the teachings. For example, Burton Watson of Columbia University translated the Lotus Sutra and participated in many translations of the goshō for the Soka Gakkai. His translation of Chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, for example, calls Bodhisattva Jofukyo¹⁰, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. However, both Nichiren Shu and Rissho Kosei Kai have translated his name as

⁹ Daimoku – the title of a sutra; the chanting of the title of a sutra, namely the title of the Lotus Sutra, Namumyōhōrengekyō.

¹⁰ Bodhisattva Jofukyo – also Bodhisattva Fukyo – a bodhisattva described in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra who revered everyone for their innate Buddha-nature, and was persecuted because of his compassionate behavior.

Bodhisattva Never Despise. I read all three of these translations, but mostly the translations of Nichiren Shu¹¹ and Rissho Kosei Kai¹² because their translations are similar and seem more authentic, while Burton Watson's translation seems watered down. That said, I must add that to his credit Watson, when asked by the Gakkai to alter his translation of the *Ongi Kuden* (the Oral Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin) to suit them, refused.

RH: Because I can't read English, I can't really tell the difference. But I would have to assume there would be a huge difference between the translation of a believer and the translation of an academic or a professional translator.

Because you read the three copies of the Lotus Sutra, you are learning. By comparing the three copies you can tell what is right and what isn't. Without the comparison, you couldn't tell the difference. If you only read one, let's say you only read the Lotus Sutra by Nichiren Shu, you would not know that there is a difference.

When we notice mistakes or notice differences, we can be those people who communicate to others that something is not quite right. There is a language barrier that just exists. That's just how it is. When you notice those things, make a point so that others will learn. Every time you come upon something that sounds weird or different from what you've heard before, or is unclear, please let me know the source and the exact location so that I can find it and clarify the unclear points.

This is true for me too, when I read something over and over I sometimes realize it doesn't make sense or isn't clear. I wish that you don't forget that when you are reading the writings of Nichiren Daishonin again and again over the years, you will begin to realize the differences between points that have been translated. Those differences can only be understood by believers, and not by a linguist. Those points are really important for a believer. So don't forget.

Professor Donald Keene (Jp. Name: Kiin Donarudo) has been traveling to and living in Japan since World War II [and became a Japanese citizen in 2012]. He's a scholar who has been studying the Japanese language and culture for over 60 years. He can speak and write Japanese. But when I see him on TV or read his books, his Japanese is not quite native. It's a little different. That's just what it is. So when you read the translated books you have to expect that.

B4: To find translations of the Lotus Sutra and other books there is a webcrawler that searches multiple book seller sites online: www.addall.com.

RH: Good. There are limitations for one person. I strongly feel that those corrections are made by the collective effort of all of you. Your responsibility is quite huge.

QUESTION: Why is it that Taisekiji¹³ and Soka Gakkai chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, and Shoshinkai Nan-myoho-rence-kyo?

RH: Fate led me to start traveling frequently to the United States many years ago. But it was not until a few years ago that I noticed the difference. I was surprised that neither Taisekiji nor Soka

¹¹ Nichiren Shu – a sect of Nichiren Buddhism that chants Namumyōhōrengekyō, but worships Shakyamuni as the true Buddha.

¹² Rissho Kosei Kai – is a Buddhist lay movement in Japan that regards and cherishes the Lotus Sutra as the highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha. They regard Shakyamuni as the Buddha; recite parts of the Lotus to either a statue of Shakyamuni or a scroll with the image of Shakyamuni on it.

¹³ Taisekiji – the Head Temple of Nichiren Shoshu. The organization of priests and believers associated with the head temple and its current direction.

Gakkai noticed this. The believers in the US spell it out phonetically: NAMUMYŌHŌRENGEKYŌ. When you write it in Japanese kanji characters it is broken up in what would be considered syllables in English. So spelling in English NAMU MYOHO RENGE KYO is what it looks like when it is spelled phonetically. But when you pronounce it, it is NAN... MYŌHŌRENGEKYŌ. Nichiren Shu, the Minobu Sect, pronounces it: NA – MU – MYO.... They place the emphasis on each character. Nichiren Shoshu, by contrast, pronounces it NANMYŌ. Instead of pronouncing each of the seven characters as separate and distinct, in Nichiren Shoshu you read and believe all the characters as One.

From the standpoint of Japanese pronunciation, Nanmyōhōrengekyō sounds more natural and easier on the ears.

So, when you write it, it is NAMUMYŌHŌRENGEKYŌ. But when you chant it, it's NANMYŌHŌRENGEKYŌ.

Which is easier to pronounce for English speakers, Nan or Nam?

B2: For me it is easier to say Nan – myōhōrengekyō.

B3: I learned it back in 1984 with Rev. Yamaguchi. It is easier to say NAN for me too.

B1: I agree, NAN is a lot easier. It sounds more fluid.

B4: I had learned from NSA to say NAM. And when I switched over after reading this to say NAN, it seemed like a natural change.

RH: Are you all reciting the *seoge*¹⁴?

Believers: Yes

RH: Here is how to do *hikki daimoku*¹⁵ (NA MU). In the morning you face East, then recite the abbreviated Hoben¹⁶ and Juryo¹⁷ chapters. When you finish the recitation you chant three *hikki daimoku* and read the first prayer. Then you face Gohonzon¹⁸ and recite the entire sutra book, including *seoge* once through, then chant daimoku. At night you recite the entire sutra book once through and chant daimoku. You do not do *hikki daimoku* at night.

QUESTION: What is the importance of *ushi tora gongyo*¹⁹? Why do the priests chant *ushi tora gongyo*?

¹⁴ Seoge – the extended Hoben (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, beginning with the verse section that follows the *junyoze* (ten aspects, i.e. nyoze so, etc.)

¹⁵ Hikki daimoku - prolonged daimoku or chanting each syllable, e.g. NA MU MYO HO REN GE KYO.

¹⁶ Hoben – 2nd chapter of the Lotus Sutra is the heart of the first half of the Lotus Sutra and explains that all life is equal to Buddha's life.

¹⁷ Juryo – 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra is the heart of the second half of the Lotus Sutra and explains that the key reason for the equality of life is that all living things possess the Buddha's life of MYŌRENGEKYŌ

¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ Gongyo – in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism the practice is to chant daimoku (Nanmyōhōrengekyō) and recite the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra in the morning and evening. *Ushi tora gongyo* is to do morning going between the hours of 2:20 and 4:30AM.

RH; The traditional way of counting hours in Japan is different from the way hours are counted in the West, which the Japanese have now adopted. In the traditional Japanese way of counting hours *ushi* (the hour of the ox) begins at 2:00-2:20AM, and the hours of *tora* (the hour of the tiger) begins at 4:00AM. So the hours of *ushi tora* are between 2:20 and 4:30AM. It is called *ushi tora* gongyo because that is the time in which you chant that gongyo. When you practice *ushi tora* gongyo you are chanting for (wishing for) all sentient beings to believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō.

So, why do we do *ushi tora* gongyo from 2:20 to 4:30AM? When I said you practice *ushi tora* gongyo wishing for all sentient beings to believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō, it is not because we want to recruit more people as members. That is not it at all. The reason we chant for all beings to believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō is so that everyone—all sentient beings—can reach enlightenment someday. That is the wish. That is why you are doing it. The reason you do it between 2:20 and 4:30AM is because the time of *ushi* (about 2:20AM) is the last hour, and the deepest and darkest hour of the day. And the time of *tora* (about 4:30AM) is the closest time to the dawning of the new day. As *ushi* is the darkest hour of the day, there is a lot of confusion and unclear feelings and thoughts within an individual's head and heart. While *tora*—the hour when the new day begins, and the sun is beginning to rise—is the closest to Buddhahood. The hours of *ushi tora* are the in between time—the end of the old day and the beginning of a new day.

In the traditional Japanese time system, *ushi* (2:20AM) was the end of the day. Today we think that midnight is when we switch over to the next day. But traditionally, it was at about 2:00AM. People used to say that even trees and grass were in a deep sleep at about that time. We practice gongyo between the hours of *ushi tora* because they are special, spiritual hours.

Remember, *ushi tora* gongyo is not for your personal gain—your personal wishes. It is specifically to wish for all living things to reach Buddhahood.

GOSHO SELECTION



EXCERPTS

“On the Attainment of Buddhahood by Women”²⁰

The “Devadatta chapter [chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra] states: “The Buddha said to the monks: ‘In future ages if there are good men or good women who, on hearing the “Devadatta” chapter of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law, believe and revere it with pure hearts and harbor no doubts or perplexities, they will never fall into hell or the realm of hungry spirits or of beasts, but will be born in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions, and in the place where they are born they will constantly hear this sutra. If they are born among human or heavenly beings they will enjoy exceedingly wonderful delights, and if they are born in the presence of a Buddha, they will be born by transformation from lotus flowers. ‘”

²⁰ The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Volume II, pp 306-310 (Thought to have been written in 1265.)

The ‘Devadatta’ chapter contains two admonitions. One makes clear how Devadatta propagated the Lotus Sutra and enabled Shakyamuni to gain the way. The other explains how Manjushri expounded the sutra and enabled the dragon king’s daughter to attain Buddhahood.

This chapter was kept hidden in the imperial palace in Ch’ang-an and only the remaining twenty-seven chapters of the sutra were spread throughout the world. Hence, during the reign of seven royal houses, from the time of the Ch’in dynasty to that of the Liang, this twenty-seven chapter version of the sutra was read and lectured upon. Later, a priest named Dharma Teacher Man, having realized that the “Devadatta” chapter was lacking in the version of the Lotus Sutra then in circulation, searched for and found the missing chapter in the city of Ch’ang-an. Since then, the twenty-eight chapter version of the sutra has been the one in general circulation.

....

The sutra texts tell us that a single person in the course of a single day has eight million four thousand thoughts. And all of these various thoughts produce karma that will lead to rebirth in the three evil paths.

We living beings in this threefold world with its twenty-five realms keep repeating a cycle of transmigration; like birds flitting from tree to tree in a forest, we die and are born again, are born again and then die. Revolving like cartwheels, we go round and round in a process of birth and death that has no beginning and no end, creatures under the heavy burden of evil karma.

Thus the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra states, “Sentient beings transmigrate, born into the six realms of existence, like cartwheels turning without beginning or end. At times they are fathers or mothers, at times they are men or women, through birth after birth, existence after existence forming bonds of obligation with one another.”

The second volume of the Lotus Sutra says, “There is no safety in the threefold world; it is like a burning house, replete with a multitude of sufferings.”

And volume twenty-two of the Nirvana Sutra states: The bodhisattvas, mahasattvas, observe living beings and see that, because of the causes and conditions created by color, scent, taste, and touch, they have been suffering constantly since numberless, uncountable kalpas ago....

....

How, then, are they to break free from the threefold world? They must wipe out ignorance through the power of the Buddhist teachings and their practices, and awaken to the enlightenment of the essential nature of phenomena, the true aspect of reality.

Well then, within these Buddhist teachings, what practice is to be carried out in order to free oneself from the sufferings of birth and death? Simply, the practice of the wonderful Law of the single vehicle.

....

The [Fugen] Sutra ²¹ states: “This great vehicle sutra is the treasure storehouse of the Buddhas, the eye of the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences, the seed from which spring the Thus Come Ones of the three existences,”

With the exception of this Lotus Sutra, the attainment of Buddhahood is not regarded as a possibility. Nowhere outside of this one sutra is there any indication that women can attain Buddhahood. In fact, in the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, women are looked on with great distaste.

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²¹ Fugen Sutra – *the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue* – the 3rd sutra in the “Three-fold Lotus Sutra” series, which is composed of the *Muryōgi Sutra* (“The Sutra of Innumerable Meanings”), the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Fugen Sutra*.

The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai²² states, "The other sutras predict Buddhahood only for bodhisattvas, but not for persons of the two vehicles. They predict it only for men, but not for women." His commentary makes clear that none of the other sutras predict that a woman can attain Buddhahood.

Moreover, when the two Buddhas, Shakyamuni and [Taho]²³, were seated side by side in the treasure tower, Manjushri entered the ocean in order to propagate the wonderful Law, and then return to the presence of the two Buddhas. At that time a bodhisattva named Wisdom Accumulated, a disciple of the Buddha Many Treasures of the World of Treasure Purity, objected to the assertion that the dragon king's daughter could attain Buddhahood....

....

But Shariputra, foremost in wisdom, without criticizing what Manjushri had said directly, pointed out many reasons why it was difficult to believe that a dragon girl could attain Buddhahood. He observed that a woman's body is soiled and defiled, not a vessel for the Law, as is made clear in the Hinayana²⁴ and provisional teachings.²⁵ But Manjushri said that, to demonstrate whether or not she could attain Buddhahood, the dragon girl would now appear in the presence of the Buddha.

True to these words, the eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king, without changing out of her dragon body, appeared in the presence of the Buddha and presented a wish-granting jewel said to be worth as much as the major system to the Buddha. The Buddha, pleased, accepted the jewel.

At that time Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated and Shariputra, their doubts resolved, came to realize that a woman can in fact attain Buddhahood. Hence this has come to be looked on as a model of how women can attain Buddhahood. If you wish to know more of the matter in detail, you may read of it in the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra.

In his *Outstanding Principles of the Lotus Sutra*, the Great Teacher Dengyo states: "The dragon king's daughter, an instructor of others, did not need to undergo countless kalpas of austere practice, nor do living beings, who receive instruction, need to undergo such practice. Instructors and instructed alike need no such kalpas of practice. Through the power of the Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law they can attain Buddhahood in their present form."

....

If one goes by the sutras preached prior to the Lotus Sutra, one could not imagine it would be possible even for women of the human or heavenly realms to attain Buddhahood. And yet the dragon king's daughter, a being of the realm of animals, without changing out of the form she had been born in as a result of lax observance of the precepts, attained Buddhahood in that very body. What a marvelous event!

....

Thus reading one sentence or one phrase of this sutra, or writing out one character or one stroke of it, can become the cause that enables one to escape from the sufferings of birth and death and attain great enlightenment. So it was that a certain person, because he formed a relationship with the words of this sutra, was able to return to life from the hall of Yama, the judge of the dead. And because

²² T'ien-t'ai – (538-597) the founder of a Chinese school of Buddhism who made a theoretical categorization of Shakyamuni's teachings.

²³ Taho – Many Treasures Buddha

²⁴ Hinayana – or Theravada Buddhism – Lesser Vehicle – teachings to eliminate human desires, upholding precepts, adhering to the teachings taught in the first 14 years of Shakyamuni's preaching life, and thereby achieving personal enlightenment. It also teaches the ultimate aim of attaining nirvana of no remainder, the state in which both body and mind are annihilated, and one is no longer born in the world.

²⁵ Provisional teachings – teachings expounded as a temporary means to lead people to the true teachings. These are the teachings that accord with the people's capacity, or accord with their minds. They are not the teachings that accord with the Buddha's mind, and thus do not lead to enlightenment. These teachings follow the period in which the Hinayana teachings were taught. They are not the true teachings. The true teaching is the Lotus Sutra.

another person wrote out the sixty-four characters that make up the titles of the eight volumes of the Lotus Sutra, his deceased father was led to the realm of heaven.

For it is a fact that both the beings and the environment of the Avichi hell exist within the life of the highest sage [Buddha], and both hell and the palaces of heaven are all part of the makeup of the Thus Come One. The life and the environment of Vairochana Buddha never transcend the lives of ordinary mortals; his enlightened form never departs from the wanders and delusions of ordinary beings.

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