

THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

WINTER

2011

Hokkeko Shinjyo

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND FOR DAILY PRACTICE¹

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- Never forget the belief of *Houbo-genkai*.
(*Houbo-genkai*: The teaching of the Lotus Sutra which states that believing in other laws should be harshly punished. This is because the Lotus Sutra is the only way to become enlightened. Therefore there is no need to seek other laws.)
- There's no Law² without practice.
- Always have the courage to teach the Law to others.
(*Hajya-kensho*: break the wrong law and show the correct one.)
- Never forget the belief of *Okuji-humo*.
(*Okuji-humo*: whatever struggles, sadness, pain, or hunger you may suffer, or no matter who tries to influence you, don't forget the teachings of the Lotus Sutra engraved deeply in your heart.)
- Benefits in this world are not what we seek.
(*Jikyo-riki*: This is a term from the 20th chapter of the Lotus Sutra which indicates that

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² Law – Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Middle Way

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Buddha shows (*ji*) and teaches (*kyo*) the Law of Lotus Sutra, and attracts people to the right path by using benefits (*ri*) in this world. However, even if you don't get what you want, in the end, the ultimate goal is to devote your life to become Buddha. To achieve enlightenment is the real happiness (*ki*.)

- Practice for *Jobutsu-daigan* and *Bodaishin-kengo*.
(*Jobutsu-daigan*: the greatest wish for human beings is to become Buddha. We have many small wishes as a result of our desires; however, from the standpoint of the Buddha, all these small wishes are enveloped in the big wish to become Buddha.)

(*Bodaishin-kengo*: the mindset that strives in this short life as a human being to seek for the way to become Buddha)

- Be proud to be born to recite *Odaimoku* (*Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*)
- Be independent; do not listen to rumors and do not flatter others.
- Be thankful to have the mind of *Myoho-monpo*.
(*Myoho-monpo*: the state of mind which tries to seek for the person and the place where the Law of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* is being taught no matter what kind of obstacles try to hinder your way.)

KEGI AND KEHO KOSEN-RUFU

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June 2009

QUESTION: Please explain the correct meaning of *kegi no kosen-rufu* (widespread acceptance of the Dai-Gohonzon³ as the true object of worship)? This is what the Gakkai⁴ says they are accomplishing.

Reverend Raido Hirota (RH): There are two aspects of *kosen rufu*: *keho* and *kegi*. *Keho* is the Buddha's teaching (or the entity) that causes all people to become enlightened. *Kegi* is the form (substantiation) in which people are led to Buddhism. *Keho* is the foundation. The teaching is the foundation. To lead people you must first have the foundation or the teaching. Then you must understand the time, the capacity of the people (the nature of their understanding of Buddhism), the nature of a country and its culture. This is *kegi*. To tell people about the practice you must know about

³ Dai-Gohonzon – also called the Kaidan Gohonzon. The plank Gohonzon enshrined at Taisekiji.

⁴ Gakkai – Soka Gakkai – SGI – a lay organization that wrongfully uses some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in its own philosophy and practice.

the culture, the capacity of the people and the condition of the country. This is the difference between *keho* and *kegi*.

For the Soka Gakkai to say that they will accomplish *kegi no kosen rufu* means to them that all people in the world will receive Nam-myoho-renge-kyo honzons and chant the daimoku of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. But their teaching (*keho*) is not correct because they believe that with everyone chanting in the world they will have accomplished *kegi no kosen rufu*. Is it acceptable for them to achieve *kegi no kosen rufu* even though the teaching (*keho*) is wrong? Can you say it's okay to eat poison to fill up your stomach because you're hungry? Just because you chant daimoku⁵, can you say you're practicing Nichiren Daishonin's⁶ teaching?

Believer 1 (B1): I was given a card in the subway by an SGI member. It says "Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. Recite this phrase daily for individual happiness and world peace."

Believer 2 (B2): Is that *kegi no kosen-rufu*?

RH: There are so many religions that chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, so there is some confusion about it. There is also a mistaken belief that all religions that chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo are the same. But of course they are not. The Gakkai card says chant this daily for happiness and world peace, but that is not the message of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. For example, we here worship Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo to Gohonzon which has Namu-myoho-renge-kyo written down its center. The Nichiren Shu⁷ sect of Mt. Minobu⁸, on the other hand, chants Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and worships a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. Even some religions that worship a physical Gohonzon like ours have a different belief. In Nichiren Shoshu⁹, the Gohonzon reads Namu-myoho-renge-kyo Nichiren down the middle. The reason the Gohonzon has Nichiren Daishonin's name on it is because we consider his mind, his spirit and his teachings alive even today. But in other religions the name of the high priest is written in place of Nichiren Daishonin's name.

With regard to the Soka Gakkai, they profess to be followers of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, but what they do is pursue earthly desires and worship a living figure, Mr. Ikeda, who's own pursuit is to achieve as many titles for himself and as much property for his organization as he can.

B2: With all these different Nichiren Buddhisms practicing their interpretation of *kosen-rufu*, doesn't the message get muddied? There's complete confusion.

RH: Yes, there's complete confusion. What they're doing is just following the rituals and forgetting the basic foundation of faith.

⁵ Daimoku – Odaimoku – chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

⁶ Nichiren Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

⁷ Nichiren Shu – a sect of Nichiren Buddhism that chants Namu-myoho-renge-kyo but believes in Shakyamuni as the true Buddha.

⁸ Mt. Minobu – Nichiren Daishonin spent his later years on Mt. Minobu and is buried there.

⁹ Nichiren Shoshu – the Buddhist religion that embraces and recites the true Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo as the original cause of enlightenment, and believes in Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

B3: What can be done to remedy this situation—this confusion? What can we do, or other people do to stop this confusion from happening?

RH: I want you believers to be confident in a good way, and proud of your belief. You are the only people who understand the true meaning of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. That cannot be said for believers of other religions, such as SGI or Taisekiji temple. Of course, you will face rejection or encounter conflict from believers of other religions or nonbelievers. But no matter what kind of conflict or rejection you encounter, you should be confident in your belief.

B4: Regarding other Nichiren sects, there was one I came upon before I started practicing with this temple called *Honmon Shoshu*. Do you know anything about their background? I found them through the Internet. They claim to have the actual Dai-Gohonzon. They claim that Nichimoku Shonin¹⁰ was actually the Daishonin's successor, and that Nikko Shonin¹¹ came from Nichimoku Shonin. They may be *Nichiama Homonji*.

RH: Basically those religions affiliated with Homonji temple worship Shakyamuni as the true Buddha. Here we worship Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha. The temples affiliated with Homonji temple place a statue of Shakyamuni in front of Gohonzon.

B4: I don't know about Nichiama Homonji's practices, but I do know for a fact from a friend who has visited Kitiyama Homonji Homozu that they actually have a statue of Nichiren in front of Gohonzon. And I know that Honmon Shoshu used a statue of Nichiren Daishonin.

B5: I know a little about this. They may or may not have a statue, but that is not as important as what they actually say, which is that they believe that Shakyamuni is the true Buddha. And they are a part of Nichiren Shu. They are under the Nichiren Shu umbrella. It is clear after reading lectures online that they identify Nichiren as a saint. They don't look upon him as the Buddha of the modern era.

B6: When I went to Kiyoto, I went to a Shoshin-kai¹² temple and there I saw a very large head of the Daishonin right in front of Gohonzon in the butsudān¹³. I was surprised at that.

RH: Even within Nichiren Shoshu there are some temples which have statues of Nichiren Daishonin on the altar in front of Gohonzon. In addition, some temples hang a picture of Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin on screens on both sides of Gohonzon. The manner of displaying the seated figure of Nichiren Daishonin in front of Gohonzon and the portraits of Nikko and Nichimoku Shonins on hanging screens on either side of Gohonzon is a tradition that originated at Taisekiji. Some older temples, including Shoshin-kai temples which were established ages ago, were influenced by this tradition and continue to display these replicas in the same manner. However, in the Shoshin-kai, even if they do carry on this tradition of displaying the statue and the screens, it does not mean that they are worshipping those physical objects or figures. The focus in the Shoshin-kai is always on worshipping

¹⁰ Nichimoku Shonin – Niidakyo Ajari Nichimoku (1260-1333) 3rd High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who inherited the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin from Nikko Shonin.

¹¹ Nikko Shonin – Byakuren Ajari Nikko Shonin (1246-1333) 2nd High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who received the transfer of the teachings direct from Nichiren Daishonin.

¹² Shoshin-kai – the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.

¹³ Butsudān – the Buddha's house or the Buddhist altar where the Gohonzon is enshrined.

the inspiration behind Gohonzon, or the spirit of Gohonzon, which is the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. This is the key point.

One distinctive difference between Nichiren Shoshu and other Nichiren sects with regard to the figure of Nichiren Daishonin is that in Nichiren Shoshu Daishonin's statue always has a hollow in the chest, and usually the head of the figure is removable. When you remove the head you can see the hollow. In the hollow is placed a Gohonzon. This symbolizes that Nichiren Daishonin had the life of Buddha within him. It also signifies that everyone has the life of Buddha within them. If the statue was too small to make a hollow in which to place Gohonzon, the Gohonzon is then placed on the back of the statue.

In other Nichiren sects the statues of Nichiren Daishonin are in most cases gilded or lacquered to beautify them. In Nichiren Shoshu the statues of Nichiren Daishonin are not gilded or lacquered or idealized in anyway. They are simple representations or depictions of how the Daishonin really was.

B3: The situation that you've just described, how different temples have different figures or statues, emphasizes the point that this religion is left to individual temples to develop their own style or twist on the religion. Would that be a true statement? It appears that there is no central leader or chief who would say you can't use that statue, or that it has to be a certain way. It seems to be left up to individual priests in these temples. That's how it appears to me. Is this a characteristic of Nichiren Shoshu, including the Shoshin-kai? There doesn't seem to be a central authority that tells individual temples how to set up their altar or conduct their practices.

RH: No, that's not true. Within Nichiren Shoshu there are three acceptable styles of altar display. The first style is as we do, displaying Gohonzon only without any statues or pictures of the Daishonin, Nikko or Nichimoku Shonins. The second style is to display the Gohonzon with a seated figure of Nichiren Daishonin in front of Gohonzon. And the third style is Gohonzon at the center, a seated figure of Nichiren Daishonin in front, and the portraits of Nikko and Nichimoku on either side of Gohonzon. Each individual temple can select a style from these three. Yet, while each temple has the freedom to choose their preference, they are not allowed to create their own style beyond these three distinct Nichiren Shoshu styles of altar display.

B3: Who would police that? If a priest chose to display a style other than the three acceptable styles, who would prevent that from happening? How would that be prohibited?

RH: It is expected that either priests from other temples who visit that temple, or believers of the temple, or believers of other temples who visit that temple will complain about it, or challenge it and persuade the priest (the temple) not to change or go beyond the regulations of the religion. If the temple or priest does not heed the admonitions and persists in going beyond what is stipulated and acceptable by the religion, that temple or priest should be excommunicated from Nichiren Shoshu.

Here is an example regarding confusion on styles. About 300 years ago, during the Edo period (1615-1868), Taiseikiji temple had a budget shortfall. At that time there was a temple called Yoboji in Kyoto. Because Yoboji was in the capital city, it was very wealthy. So what Taiseikiji temple did was to invite the chief priest of Yoboji to be the High Priest of Taiseikiji so that they would have financial support from Yoboji. However, by that time Yoboji had significantly altered its style. They were now displaying Shakyamuni Buddha in front of Gohonzon. And the priests from Yoboji, who became High

Priests of Taisekiji insisted on Taisekiji adopting the same style of display. So Taisekiji temple complied and began placing Shakyamuni Buddha in front of Gohonzon. When the new High Priest from Yoboji temple put the statue of Shakyamuni Buddha on the altar, the original believers of Taisekiji strongly objected, and threw the statue away. Of course, the High Priest replaced the statue with another of Shakyamuni, and again the believers removed it and discarded it. This conflict and confusion lasted for a century. Finally, in the early 18th century, with the 26th High Priest, Nichikan Shonin (1655-1726), this situation was resolved.

We must be very careful.

Today at Taisekiji there is a High Priest who proclaims himself to be a living Nichiren Daishonin—a living Buddha. That is why there is a separation between Taisekiji temple and Nichiren Shoshu Shoshin-kai temples. History proves that if you have a High Priest who has the correct belief, then the entire religion can act as a whole body from head to toe. But because there is a person leading as high priest who is not correct, or in fact is wrong, there is the situation we have today, which is again confusion and conflict.

B4: Something the Gakkai is saying and is triumphant about is that there are a bunch of Nichiren Shoshu temples, especially in the north of Japan that kept old Buddhist treasures and statues of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Gakkai challenged these temples to get rid of all of them. How true is this? And what really happened in this case?

RH: When the Soka Gakkai movement emerged back in the 1930s, the movement was so young and radical. So yes, they did that sort of thing. They broke into temples and destroyed statues. But I haven't heard of anything like that these days. And it is clearly a crime to break into a temple that you have no relation to and steal and destroy property. We need to try to change or convert minds, not commit crimes. Destroying the object does not mean you've changed the person's mind.

B4: What the Gakkai says is that these were Taisekiji temples that had these objects, and they were electing to get rid of them because they were against the faith. So we corrected all these temples that were not practicing correctly. That's what they say.

RH: Again it's committing a crime; and not changing minds. What the Gakkai members say is we are doing what is right. In Japan the Gakkai is eager to gain political power. They engage in illegal acts during the elections, such as requiring the members to vote for candidates of the Gakkai's party.

Conveying the Law to others is difficult. For example, if you go to your friend and try to convert him or her by attacking or denouncing his belief directly and throwing his statue or cross away, your friend would be offended and would never convert. What you must do is talk with the person peacefully, respectfully, and reasonably persuade the person to take faith in this teaching.

ON FREEDOM
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QUESTION: How do you describe Namu-myoho-renge-kyo to someone who has never heard of it?

RH: Namu-myoho-renge-kyo teaches that all life is equal and that all life has the most valuable freedom that is found anywhere else. (I use the word “freedom” because some people may not understand the word Buddha or Buddha nature.). Namu-myoho-renge-kyo teaches and shows that all life has parity. All life has the life of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

More often than not, we are concerned with our own freedom—freedom and independence just for ourselves. But if we don’t consider others, it is not freedom. It is a fundamental rule of nature to think about others. Freedom is based on our desires. That is, having freedom is a desire. That is why we want it. But thinking of others is important to achieving real freedom. Being concerned with the happiness of others is part of being free.

Musa is a term that means creating nothing. Show yourself as you are. Don’t pretend to be something you are not. Don’t pretend to be good, or don’t artificially beautify yourself. Life, according to the Law, is *musa*—making up, or creating nothing. Being honest. Being your true self.

A selfish life is called *usa*, meaning everything. It is the opposite of *musa*. A life of pretense and showing off. Doing whatever you want to do: eating whatever you want, accumulating as much money as you can, living for yourself. Our society defines this way of life as freedom. Buddhism, on the other hand asserts that *musa* is freedom.

In mundane terms or within earthly values freedom means you can do whatever you want and sacrifice others’ freedom, others’ values, and others’ lives. Or it means you can buy your freedom with money. But none of this is true. Being Buddha is equal to being free. Man’s concept of freedom is completely different from Buddha’s freedom.

B3: How is it different?

RH: Freedom, in terms of earthly values is based on, or focused on your own desire. When you buy an expensive car you think this is for me. This shows me off and says I’m superior to others. This is earthly freedom. It is about self. It compares self with others. Moreover, in this case the self does not think that everyone is equal.

On the other hand, if a child is sick, a parent wouldn’t think, Oh, I’m fine, it’s just him who’s sick. Parents think of their child as themselves. There is no boundary between the parent and the child. This kind of kindness, compassion, consideration and respect of others is comparable to the Buddha’s

concept of freedom. The Buddha's concept of freedom emphasizes equality. It is unselfish because with the Buddha's concept of freedom there is the recognition of the life of Buddha—Namu-myoho-rence-kyo—in everyone and in all things.

B5: Can it be described as selfless humility?

RH: Buddhism does not recommend charitable giving. Unless you convey the fundamental Law to others, the material support such as giving food or money does not make any sense. It means nothing. It's not a denial of charitable giving, but unless the fundamental Law of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo is introduced there is no ultimate relief for others.

B1: I thought that by volunteering with community service and contributing to good causes aren't we showing people how we can help others?

RH: I don't mean you shouldn't give. But material support is not the ultimate solution.

It is always difficult to deal with freedom. In this world everyone, from an ordinary citizen to even a dictator, seeks freedom. Of course ordinary citizens say that they want freedom. Dictators want their freedom too, according to his or her own values, and they dare to regulate the freedom of others. As you can see, we often mistake what freedom is.

A PRACTITIONER OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

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June 2009

QUESTION: How much can we change by chanting and doing good deeds?

RH: You can live as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra.

B6: What does it mean to be a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra?

RH: As long as we are alive in this world, the life of a practitioner of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo should be proud and confident in making decisions. Most people are confident in terms of decision making. People believe in themselves and believe in their own values, and make decisions based on them. But if we were to only live based on our own desires, we would, on many occasions, make mistakes. In order not to make mistakes by relying entirely on ourselves, we need to follow the Buddha's Law. But we should not remove ourselves entirely from the decision making process either and rely 100% on the Buddha's Law. We should rely on both the Buddha's Law and on our own rational thinking.

For instance, sometimes people are confident, while there are others who feel incapable of making decisions and want to rely solely on the Buddha's Law. But it is not the right thing to do. We have to live our own lives. We have to believe in ourselves, while at the same time applying the Buddha's Law and the Buddha's teachings.

Nichiren Daishonin described himself as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra—as a believer. The word practitioner indicates that you are still on the Way; you have not arrived. You are not complete. So we as believers should do the same as Nichiren Daishonin and identify ourselves as practitioners of the Lotus Sutra as well.

B6: I feel a sense of disparity here. You say you should have faith in yourself and things you want to do in life, and that that is separate from your practice as a Bodhisattva of the Earth¹⁴. It seems to me almost like egoism. If you follow your desires or wishes that would be egoism. But my understanding of this practice is to try to have the ego under control; not give it reign to do what it wants to do. So to me there's a disparity.

RH: Living as a practitioner of the Lotus sutra means as long as you live you will face having to make decisions. You will have to choose between this or that. Then you think about what motivates you. The motivation could be your personal desire, or it could be the Law of the Lotus Sutra. I encourage you to choose the motivation based on the Lotus Sutra. Of course, we are human beings, so it becomes difficult to choose this over that. But try as much as you can to make the choice based on the Lotus Sutra. That is the way of life of a practitioner.

Take myself, for example. I want to buy a car and I was thinking of buying a Porsche. I'm a guy, and it's cool. I want to drive a Porsche at least once in my life. But wait a minute. Is it really necessary and appropriate for a priest to drive a Porsche? If I follow my desire, I'd do the cool thing. I'm a guy...I want to drive a Porsche...so why not? But as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, I have to think about it rationally. For a priest a Porsche is not necessary.

B5: If I'm having trouble at work with my boss, then it's not enough to just chant about that situation. I have to chant for the wisdom to make the right decision and how to deal with it. Then take responsibility and deal with it. Is that correct?

RH: The teaching of Nichiren Daishonin is simple. But although it is simple, it is not in reality easy to practice in daily life. If you have a problem and you want the wisdom to solve it, chanting does not bring about some supernatural help for you. As a practitioner, you should have had some accomplishments in your life. By chanting you can bring forth a good solution based on your own accomplishments.

One aspect of Gohonzon is that it is a mirror reflecting your own image. By looking into the mirror you realize that you yourself have the Law of Buddha within you. Chanting to Gohonzon is like practicing to keep your eyes looking straight into the mirror to see who you are. If we don't practice chanting, it's as if we close our eyes, or look elsewhere, even if we have a mirror in front of us. By chanting, we straighten ourselves and look directly into the mirror and see ourselves reflected there.

B4: You said there were two things. The first was to look into the mirror. What is the second thing?

¹⁴ Bodhisattva of the Earth – the bodhisattvas entrusted by Shakyamuni to propagate the Mystic Law in the age of the Latter Day of the Law. It also means the followers of Nichiren Daishonin who embrace and propagate his true teachings.

RH: Nichiren Daishonin said, if you fall into hell you cannot ask me to save you. You are the only person who can save you. You have to save yourself. You have to take responsibility for your life. As we said, chanting toward Gohonzon is like looking into a mirror. When you look into the mirror of Gohonzon you only see yourself. Therefore you cannot expect more than yourself. If you cannot achieve some goal, it is not Buddha's fault. You have to look at yourself.

The more you try, the closer you get to the mirror. The closer you get to the mirror, the more of yourself you see in the mirror. Practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin should never plead, "please save me, please protect me, please give me something." That is not Nichiren Daishonin's teaching. The key is always inside yourself.

The important thing is to always live with Gohonzon, and realize the teaching of Namu-myoho-enge-kyo. No matter how shabby your house is, or how tiny your apartment may be, you should always have your Gohonzon there. Try to interact with Gohonzon. For example, one of my believers in Japan is now very old and has moved into a nursing home. In the nursing home she has a small, single room. She has enshrined her Gohonzon in this room, and she still cherishes Gohonzon and practices to it interactively.

B3: What does it mean to interact with Gohonzon?

RH: Through chanting you see you have the life of Buddha in you. Of course, as time goes by you repeat the cycle of realizing it and forgetting it continuously.

B5: What is the difference between *Hohonzon* and *Ninhonzon*?

RH: *Ho* means the Law. So *Hohonzon* means the Law of Namu-myoho-enge-kyo. *Nin* means person. Thus *Ninhonzon* indicates the existence of Nichiren who brought this teaching to you. The object that represents both *Hohonzon* and *Ninhonzon* at the same time is the Gohonzon. *Ninhonzon* and *Hohonzon* are united in the Gohonzon. We as well need to aspire to the unified Gohonzon. We should not aim for the individual parts of Gohonzon—*Ninhonzon* and *Hohonzon*. *Ninpo ikka* – the oneness of person and the Law, which is embodied in Gohonzon, is the image of enlightenment. What Gohonzon shows is that we all equally have the potential to become enlightened. We tend to think that being enlightened means that you are like a saint. You never do anything wrong; you never make mistakes. But that is not what the Lotus Sutra teaches. Even after you become enlightened, you will still wander and still make mistakes. However, what is crucial is that you will always continue to practice.

We celebrated Oeshiki earlier today. Traditionally Oeshiki is celebrated on October 13, the day Nichiren Daishonin passed away. At the end of the Oeshiki ceremony we always say, Congratulations! This day is for celebration. It is not for mourning. The reason we celebrate Oeshiki is to remind ourselves of Daishonin's last lesson. He taught us in his last lesson that life is eternal. We should therefore not grieve on this day, because life goes on and on and on.

GOSHO SELECTION

EXCERPT

“The Treasure of a Filial Child”¹⁵

...In India there was once a great ruler, the king of the country called Parthia. This king was inordinately fond of horses and horse-raising. In time, he became so expert in raising them that he could not only turn a worthless horse into one of outstanding merit, but could also transform an ox into a horse. Eventually, he even turned people into horses and rode them. The citizens of his own state were so grieved at this last feat that he confined himself to turning men from other lands into horses. Thus, when a traveling merchant came to his kingdom from another country, he gave the merchant a potion to drink, transformed him into a horse and tied him up in the royal stables.

Even under ordinary circumstances the merchant yearned for his homeland and in particular thought longingly of his wife and child. Thus he found his lot very difficult to bear. But since the king would not allow him to go home, he could not do so. Indeed, even had it been possible, what could he have done there in his present form? So all he could do was bewail his fate morning and evening.

This man had a son who, when his father failed to return at the expected time, began to wonder if he had been killed, or had perhaps fallen ill. Feeling that, as a son, he must find out what had happened to his father, he set out upon a journey. His mother lamented, protesting that her husband had already gone off to another land and failed to return, and that if she were now to be abandoned by her only son as well, she did not know how she could carry on. But the son was so deeply concerned about his father that he nevertheless set off for the country of Parthia in search of him.

[Upon his arrival,] he put up for the night at a small lodging. The master of the house said: "How sad! You are still so young, and I can see from your face and bearing that you are a person of distinction. I had a son once, but he went off to another country and perhaps has died there. At least I do not know what has become of him. When I think of the fate of my own son, I can scarcely bear to look at you. I say this because here in this country we have a cause for great sorrow. The king of this country is so inordinately fond of horses that he ventures to make use of a strange kind of plant. If he feeds one of the narrow leaves of this plant to a person, the person turns into a horse. And if he feeds one of the broad leaves of the plant to a horse, the horse turns into a person. Not long ago a merchant came here from another country. The king fed him some of this plant, turned him into a horse and is secretly keeping him confined in the first of the royal stables."

When the son heard this, he thought that his father must have been transformed into a horse, and he asked, "What color is this horse's coat?"

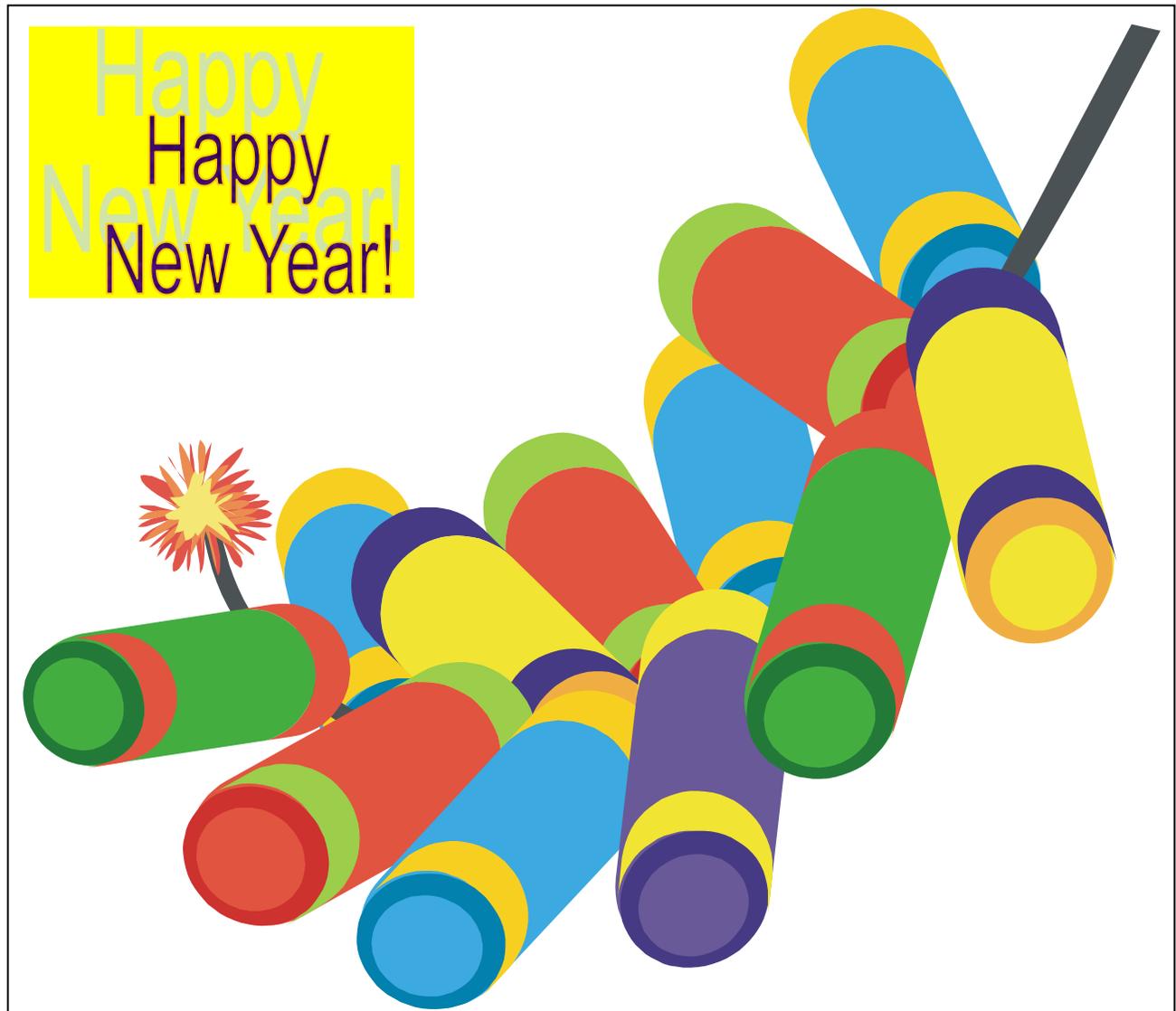
The master of the house replied, "The horse is chestnut, with white dappling on the shoulders."

After the son had learned all these things, he contrived to approach the royal palace, where he was able to steal some of the broad leaves of the strange plant. When he fed these to his father, who had been changed into a horse, his father changed back into his original form.

¹⁵ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 6, pp. 301-303

The king of the country, marveling at what had happened, handed the father over to the son, since the latter had shown himself to be such a model of filial concern, and after that he never again turned men into horses.

Who but a son would have gone to such lengths to seek out his father? The Venerable Maudgalyayana¹⁶ saved his mother from the sufferings of the realm of hungry spirits, and Jojo and Jogen¹⁷ persuaded their father to give up his heretical views. This is why it is said that a good child is a parent's treasure.



¹⁶ Maudgalyayana – One of Shakyamuni's 10 major disciples who was had exception occult abilities.

¹⁷ Jojo and Jogen – two brothers who appear in the 27th chapter of the Lotus Sutra. They led their father to become a follower of Buddha King Wisdom of the Cloud Thunder-Sound Constellation, who taught them the Lotus Sutra.