

ON A PRAYER FOR SHAKYAMUNI

Reverend Raido Hirota

QUESTION: Many times in the Goshō Nichiren Daishonin refers to Shakyamuni Buddha as "Lord Buddha." At the time Daishonin lived in Japan the people had strayed away from the correct teachings and the correct object of worship. As we know the purpose of Daishonin's advent at that time was to not only restore the people of Japan to the correct way of faith but to also bestow the true object of worship for the entire world. As time moved on after Daishonin's death much confusion ensued as to how to practice his teachings correctly. Even within Nichiren's lineage there is dispute as to what is the correct object of worship. Some schools worship Shakyamuni Buddha. Obviously the Nichiren Shōshū does not worship Shakyamuni. However without Shakyamuni Buddha there would be no Lotus Sutra. Why is there not a silent prayer of respect and gratitude for Shakyamuni Buddha? Not as the original Buddha or the eternal Buddha but simply as a great teacher who helped to further people in the journey towards enlightenment?

Reverend Raidō Hirota: Nichiren Daishonin admired Shakyamuni as the great teacher who taught the Lotus Sutra. That is why Shakyamuni's name is written on the Gohonzon: "Namu Shakyamuni Buddha," meaning "Devotion to Shakyamuni Buddha." Also, to honor the effort of other important interpreters of the Lotus Sutra the Gohonzon contains the names of people such as T'ien-t'ai the Great from China and Dengyo the Great from Japan.

Shakyamuni states in the Lotus Sutra: "Two thousand years after my death, in the era of Mappō, what should be the foundation of this faith is not myself, but the teachings of the Lotus Sutra." Shakyamuni then transferred the fundamental core of the Lotus Sutra, Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō, to Bodhisattva Jōgyō. Thus, Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō is the Law fundamental to all the teachings of the Buddha.

While Nichiren Shōshū regards Namu-myōhō-renge-kyō as the foundation of faith, other sects regard Shakyamuni as the foundation of faith and worship a statue and/or picture of him. There are other sects which worship Amida Buddha, Dainichi

Buddha, Yakushi Buddha, or they worship bodhisattvas as the object of worship such as Bodhisattva Kanzeon, Bodhisattva Jizo, and Bodhisattva Maitreya (Miroku) as objects of worship. Nichiren-shu at Minobu also worships Shakyamuni, even though they chant Namu-myho-rence-kyo. The difference is that Nichiren Shoshu refers to the Law as the object of worship (Gohonzon), while other sects refer to Buddha as the object of worship. That's the definitive difference between the Fuji school and others sects.

- 1) It is the Law that enables people to comprehend or understand
- 2) It is the Law that allows people to become Buddha
- 3) Those who become Buddha will lead others so that they can also become Buddha.

Before there was Buddha there was a Law. If there had been no Law there would be no Buddha enlightenment. And as a result there would be no possibility of anyone or everyone becoming enlightened.

Let me explain it this way: We are here because our parents gave birth to us and raised us. Likewise, our parents owe it to their parents who had done the same. How much gratitude do you have for your parents? Even if you had the meanest parents, it is because of those parents that you were born. But parents cannot conceive a child on their own. Parents cannot make hair, nails, eyes, mouth, ears, nose and feet, and internal organs on their own like a machine. It has always been the natural function of human's beings to give birth to a child, then to learn how to raise and educate the child. No matter how wonderful parents are, to only respect them is not sufficient. You must know what the true origin of the parents is. If you don't respect and know the true origin of the parents, then you cannot see everything clearly. It therefore follows that you cannot think and live correctly. Furthermore, you cannot fully appreciate your own existence until you realize and become grateful for the source of your life. In this sense, what your parents are to you is what Buddha is to Buddhism; and what the reason or cause for you to be alive is what Namu-myoho-rence-kyo is to Buddhism. If you don't have this fundamental cause (Law) as the premise for everything, the parents (Buddha) cannot procreate or come to fruition.

During Shakyamuni's lifetime, and for the first thousand years following his death (*shoho* period), and the second thousand years (*zoho period*), people longed for him, were nostalgic for him, and loved him. This love developed into faith in Shakyamuni, which

led to people developing a morality and overcoming their confusion and doubt, and gained the ability to control their sufferings. However, after two thousand years had passed, people no longer thought about Shakyamuni's existence. They lost their love for him and their belief in his teachings. In this age that we are living in, which is the Latter Day of Shakyamuni's Law (*Mappo* period) people have become controlled by their egos. They no longer trust each other, and are causing harm to each other. The result of this is chaos in the world. During such an era as *Mappo*, it is not for us to remember Shakyamuni himself. It is for us to embrace and revere the Laws that Shakyamuni taught that lead people to enlightenment.

It was Nichiren Daishonin who discovered through the Lotus Sutra that the Law Shakyamuni had realized, believed, and practiced was to be worshipped. This Law is *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*. Nichiren Daishonin was the one who fulfilled the mission of Bodhisattva Jogyo during the era of *Mappo*, which was specified in the Lotus Sutra. This is why we call Nichiren Daishonin *honbutsu*, the true Buddha, and Shakyamuni *shakubutsu*, (the shadow Buddha).