

BUDDHA, BUDDHAHOOD & ENLIGHTENMENT

With Reverend Raido Hirota

Translated and edited by Udumbara Foundation volunteers

QUESTION: What is Buddhahood? Can I attain it?

Rev. Raidō Hirota (RH): Those who practice Nichiren Daishonin's teachings correctly are bodhisattvas. Bodhisattvas are those who pursue the wisdom of Buddhahood for themselves, while teaching others at the same time. People who are only thinking of themselves are not bodhisattvas, even though they practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. One is called a bodhisattva when he or she is happy when others are happy, and sad when others are sad. We all have the ability to eventually realize Buddhahood.

QUESTION: Everybody experiences birth, sickness, aging and death. If you believe that your life is the same as Buddha, what does that mean? How is your experience of birth, sickness, aging and death different from others who do not believe that your life is Buddha? As you go through those stages how is it different?

RH: Whether you believe that your life itself is *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* or not, you will experience these four phases of life. The difference is that if you recognize that your life itself is *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*, you will know or be aware that birth, sickness, aging and death are not all that there is to life. These stages are just symptoms of this mortal body. Existing within these four stages is Buddhahood, and life extends beyond this existence. If you don't believe, then all you know is what your body experiences, and you suffer.

In life, the body and the spirit are fused and, whether you have belief in this religion or not, you can't escape the natural law that determines that the body and soul will separate and you will die. Let's say the body is a container. The spirit is like water which will take whatever shape the container is. The spirit, which is synonymous with mind, does not experience age, sickness or

death; neither is it born. Even if the container breaks or disappears, it doesn't mean that the contents are bad or ruined. It only means that the shape or form will change.

It is not coincidental that a particular container has a particular content or spirit. For those who believe in this Buddhism, the knowledge, which that spirit accumulated during life, is never going to dissipate or dissolve as though nothing was ever there, even after the container is destroyed or disappears. This is the difference between knowing and not knowing.

Everything in existence, every man, woman, child, bird, insect, etc. -- everything is contained within the spirit within that container. It's the awareness of that that makes the big difference between dying with belief and dying without belief. Dying knowing that you will continue on and that you are a part of everything, compared to dying thinking that that's the end. It's a big difference.

Pre-Lotus Sutra teachings taught that Buddha was a separate state of being, and all people could not attain it. Pre-Lotus Sutra teachings also taught that it was only human beings who were the objects of enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra, which was taught in the last eight years of Shakyamuni Buddha's life, reveals that a single mind or a single life moment contains all existence, the entirety of the universe. This is known as *ichinen sanzen* -- one mind, three thousand realms of existence.

QUESTION: If your practice consists of chanting, does that mean a deaf mute cannot attain enlightenment?

RH: Grass and trees cannot chant *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* themselves, nevertheless they can become enlightened after hearing *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*. I made a stupa with *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* written down its center for the 9/11 victims of the World Trade Center disaster. Even though *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* is written on a piece of insentient wood, that wood still enjoys the same effect of enlightenment as the grass and trees that hear *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*.

After Nichiren Daishonin left the remote island of Sado and settled in Minobu, a child of one of his believers who lived on Sado, became sick and died. The father made a wooden stupa and wrote his child's name on it, and took the stupa to the Daishonin in Minobu. Daishonin wrote *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* down the center of the stupa. The man returned to Sado with the stupa and erected it at his child's gravesite. In a letter written to this man, Daishonin explained that by placing this stupa with the inscription of *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* in the cemetery for his deceased child, the wind alone, which blows from east to west, will carry *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* to the fishes in the ocean, to the birds which might fly overhead, to the deer, to the bears, and to all other animals living in the forest and mountains. This stupa alone is one way that the awakening of the Buddha-spirit in all living things can come about.

There are some people who are healthy and can hear and chant *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*, there are others who are not. But what has primacy over the sound that your voice makes is what is in your heart. Chanting in your heart with faith is what matters. The audible sound is not important, it's what you say and hear inside your heart, inside yourself, that is paramount. To say *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* but not have it in your heart is equivalent to not saying it or not saying anything at all. The important point is that you say it with your heart and not just with your vocal cords.

