

# GONGYO

Everything in the entire universe is equal. Animals, trees, the sun, ourselves--we are all the same. Christianity teaches that only human beings can go to heaven. Shakyamuni, by contrast, realized that all life is equal. Therefore it is not only human beings that can be saved -- enlightened -- all living things have the same potential to attain enlightenment. This is the teaching of the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra (*Hoben* chapter). The 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra (*Juryo* chapter) explains the reason for this, which is that all states of existence exist in the beginningless Buddhahood, and Buddhahood exists in all the beginningless states of existence.

Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra has 28 chapters. The first 14 contain the theoretical teachings, while the second 14 contain the essential or true teachings. The most important chapter of the theoretical teachings is chapter 2, "Tactfulness" (*Hoben-pon*). Of the essential teachings it is chapter 16, "The Life-span of the Tathagata" (*Juryo-hon*) which is the most important.

We, and several other Shoshin-kai temples chant the prolonged version of the *Hoben* chapter, called *Seoge*, because it connects the *Hoben* chapter, which states that all life is equal, to the *Juryo* chapter which reveals the Buddha's own enlightenment. In other words, it provides a transition between the theoretical and the essential teachings. It is therefore important to chant this section.

Nevertheless, the most important thing is to chant *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*. The *Hoben* and *Juryo* chapters are like an instruction manual while the *Daimoku* (*Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*) is the crucial element -- the mechanism itself.

The Lotus Sutra is a conversation between the Buddha and the people. Shakyamuni understood this crucial element. However, he taught that he himself was the central figure, the Buddha, and that the people had to observe rules and practice in such and such a way for an indefinite amount of time to attain different levels of awareness. Nichiren Daishonin's teaching, on the other hand, states that he is not the only one who can attain Buddhahood. Everyone has the same potential as he, but you have to chant to achieve it. Shakyamuni said, "I am the Buddha and I am instructing you with these various teachings at this time for you people to become enlightened. In the future,

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in the fifth five hundred years after I have passed away, the Lotus Sutra will be the Way and someone will come along and teach you."

Shakyamuni created the blueprint, Nichiren Daishonin used that blueprint and built a structure. The blueprint is not useful by itself. The construction made from the blueprint, however, can stand on its own and is therefore most essential. Nichiren Daishonin used Shakyamuni's teachings to develop a system to teach others. This is what Gongyo is.