

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

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## WHAT IS NAMUMYŌHŌRENGEKYŌ REVEREND RAIDŌ HIROTA TRENTON, NEW JERSEY JULY 20, 2018

**QUESTION:** Many people practice Namumyōhōrengekyō<sup>1</sup>, and many don't understand what it is. Could you please explain what Namumyōhōrengekyō is?

**REVEREND RAIDŌ HIROTA (RH):** I have explained this several times before.

*Namu* means "I am going to believe that *Myōhōrengekyō* is my life."

*Myō* means mysterious—mystery. It comes from *Myōhō*. The Buddha had a mission to teach that even though we humans have doubt, have wrong thinking, or



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### ***The Middle Way***

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Advisor: Reverend Raidō Hirota  
Founder and Editor-in-Chief: Peach Pair  
Translator: Asako Akai Ferguson

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

are unable to control our personality, we can still become Buddha. His mission was to teach and explain to humans that everybody—every living thing—can be a Buddha. This is what *Myōhōrengekyō* means: that all living things can become Buddha. *Myō* specifically expresses this mystery.

*Hō* means Law. The Law is called *Myōhō* because it is the Law that teaches this mystery that all living things can become Buddha.

*Renge*. To explain the mystery of *Myōhō* to human beings, the Buddha used the metaphor of the lotus flower, which is an exquisite, honorable and sacred object. It is used to express that human beings, as well as all life, have the life of Buddha, and therefore every life is as honorable as the Buddha's life.

Human beings believe that when you die your life is over—terminated—that's it. This is what most humans think. At the center of the lotus blossom are the seeds which are the next generation—the next life. This flower is different from other flowers in that the seeds and the blossom of the lotus flower exist at the same time. Whereas with other flowers, the seeds don't appear until after the blossom has withered and died. The blossom of the lotus flower is the actual result, and its seeds are the reason it exists, or the cause of its existence. The lotus flower contains everything at once: the flower and the seed. The cause and the effect are united, or exist simultaneously. This is what is so special and unique about the lotus flower. That is why it is used as a metaphor to describe the Law. In life, there is cause and result every day. Everyday life consists of cause and effect. And life will continue like this forever. Even after you die, life will continue forever. And cause and effect will continue forever. Eternal life is expressed through the lotus flower which signifies the perpetuity of reason (cause) and result (effect).

The lotus flower grows with its roots grounded in mud. Every night it sinks into the muddy water, then emerges each morning without a trace of muck, and produces a beautiful flower despite its murky conditions. Human beings are like this too. We tend to blame others—parents, siblings, society—for our conditions and hardships. We place the blame on others or on other external factors. But the message symbolized by the lotus flower is that even if you are growing or living in an impure world, full of dirt and ugliness, you should believe in *Myōhō* (the Mystic Law) so that, despite your conditions, or the condition of the world, because you have the Buddha inside you, you are not getting dirty. Rather, you can bloom as beautiful as the beautiful lotus flower, that is exquisite despite its conditions.

Every life—all living things—has at its core a beautiful lotus flower, no matter what kind of life it is. This is the basis of life. So, every living thing must believe that they have within

themselves this beautiful flower that is the foundation of their life. You have to realize this. You have to realize that every life has the Buddha's life, which is what the lotus flower represents. This is the teaching of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

A question that gets at the foundation of our belief is: Why does Nichiren Shoshu<sup>2</sup> consider Nichiren Daishonin<sup>3</sup> the True Buddha?

In Nichiren Shoshu, we say that Nichiren Daishonin is the True Buddha (*Honbutsu*) and Shakyamuni<sup>4</sup> is the shadow Buddha (*Shakabutsu*). It is not only Shakyamuni Buddha who is a shadow or provisional Buddha. There are many others such as Amida Buddha<sup>5</sup>, Dainichi Buddha<sup>6</sup>, and others. Both Taisekiji<sup>7</sup> and SGI<sup>8</sup> analyze which Buddha is better, or which is superior, Nichiren Daishonin or Shakyamuni. Such analyses miss the point. There is no such thing as which is better, or which is superior. The role of a provisional Buddha is to act as an arrow pointing to, or showing the direction to the True Law. All those who became or become Buddhas did so, or will do so, because they learned and practiced the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

The content of the Lotus Sutra reveals Shakyamuni's connection to Namumyōhōrengekyō. Because, as explained in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in the inconceivable distant past as the 16<sup>th</sup> son of a Buddha whose name was Universal Surpassing Wisdom (Jp. Daitsūchishō), he was taught and practiced Namumyōhōrengekyō and taught it to others, he later became Shakyamuni Buddha on this earth. Thus, the reason or cause for Shakyamuni to be Buddha is Namumyōhōrengekyō. But Shakyamuni represents *inga iji*, or cause and effect in the phenomenal world where there is a time lapse between his past action of practice and the result of him being Shakyamuni Buddha in this world.

Nichiren Daishonin, on the other hand, exemplifies *inga guji*, the simultaneity of cause and effect because he practiced Namumyōhōrengekyō during his lifetime and proved through

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<sup>2</sup> Nichiren Shoshu - the sect of Buddhism that embraces and recites the true Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō as the original cause of enlightenment and believes in Nichiren Daishonin of the true Buddha.

<sup>3</sup> Nichiren Daishonin - (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

<sup>4</sup> Shakyamuni - Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE-949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism on this earth.

<sup>5</sup> Amida Buddha – Infinite Life or Infinite Light Buddha who is said to reside in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the Western region of the universe.

<sup>6</sup> Dainichi Buddha – a Buddha of the esoteric teachings who, it is said, is always in this world teaching the law.

<sup>7</sup> Taisekiji - the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu and its organization.

<sup>8</sup> SGI - Soka Gakkai International – a lay organization that wrongly incorporates some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism into its own philosophy and practice.

his life what he taught by attaining Buddhahood. In addition, he revealed the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō as the true path to Buddhahood, taught that Namumyōhōrengekyō is the foundation of every life form, and the foundation of life itself. So, what we use as our model for enlightenment is what is taught by Nichiren Daishonin, which is that Namumyōhōrengekyō is the foundation of all life.

There is nowhere in the Lotus Sutra<sup>9</sup> that states how or what Shakyamuni practiced during his lifetime. But what Shakyamuni taught was how important this sutra is. In chapter 10 he states, “This sutra is the mystic, essential treasury of all buddhas. . . . It is the King of all sutras.”<sup>10</sup> This sutra is, therefore, the arrow that points out the direction for people to follow to the True Law. Shakyamuni’s role, and the role of the Lotus Sutra is direction. Nichiren Daishonin revealed the ultimate destination, which is the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. That is why he is considered the essential, True Buddha, and Shakyamuni is considered a shadow or provisional Buddha. Each has a purpose.

It is only Nichiren Daishonin who taught that anyone can become Buddha. The purpose and substance of this faith, which you can tell to non-believers, and is the direction of your faith, is this catch phrase which Nichiren Daishonin taught consistently: *issai shujō dō byōdō jōbustu* or “all life can equally and impartially become enlightened” if you believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō. It is very difficult to summarize in one word what Nichiren Daishonin taught, but this phrase sums it up. It is the basic teaching of Nichiren Daishonin.



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<sup>9</sup> Lotus Sutra - - the highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, taught in the last eight years of his life. It reveals that all life has Buddha-nature, and that the life of Buddha, and all life is eternal.

<sup>10</sup> *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, pp. 190, 193



**HAVING THE BUDDHA'S HEART**  
**REVEREND RAIDŌ HIROTA**  
**TRENTON, NEW JERSEY**  
**JULY 20, 2018**

**QUESTION:** Something that troubles me daily is that nowadays there is so much greed, hatred, and violence with the potential for mass destruction and mutual annihilation. Developing the Buddha's heart seems essential. What is the Buddha's heart? How does one develop it? And can this downward spiral in society turn around just by making a connection to the Buddha-nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō, even though someone may not chant?

**RH:** This question is connected to the previous question.

In this world, people tend to think if everything is right with them, then all is right in the world. Or if the current situation is good, then there are no worries. This is how people think without giving any thought to eternal life. The world operates based on the global economy—whether it is strong or weak, beneficial or not beneficial, win or lose. What dominates the world's mindset is that for me to have freedom, it is okay to deprive others of their freedom. But if we choose to be aware that we have eternal life, that every life has the life of Buddha, and to be concerned about the wellbeing of others, and not just thinking about ourselves and our current situation but rather be mindful of the life to come after death, and that all life is connected, and if more and more people come to think this way, then every human being can be more peaceful and calmer, and true peace can be achieved.

For example, if a war breaks out somewhere in the world, many people will feel sad. But there will also be those who won't feel sad. They will want to cash in and start selling weapons and other instruments of war. There are always dichotomies in life. Sorrow is always connected to war, along with some people taking advantage of the opportunity to make a profit. And if a country happens to move forward to a better situation or better conditions, there will always be someone who will oppose it and try to redirect it and transform it in a negative way. This is how the world functions. It's how it is evolving. Recently, some people have given speeches extolling 70 years of peace since World War II. But, if you don't seek real peace, true peace will never be achieved. True peace is the recognition of eternal life, and that all life is connected, and all life has Buddha nature and can be enlightened.

When American presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon were in office, they kept damaging information concerning the Vietnam War confidential. They did not reveal it, hoping things would not turn out negatively. This is not only the case with the United States. This also happened in Japan. The leaders of countries think they can keep information secret as long as they are running a country, and they try to keep the country going in what they believe is the right direction. But running a country this way is not considering eternal life.

The United States proclaims that it is the country of freedom and equality. But I don't feel that way. When one leader keeps a negative situation or event secret, then passes that secret on to his successor, who continues to keep the secret and passes it on to the next leader of the government, and that leader keeps the secret and passes it to his successor, the effect of this is prolonged. The leaders of Japan, who caused the Pacific war during World War II, and the leaders of the U.S. who expanded the Vietnam War all believed that they were going to win. So, they kept these wars open-ended, despite the countless numbers of casualties. The wars ended badly; and politicians never ended up in jail.

**Question:** What happens when one lie after another continues to pile up? Our whole civilization is built on lies.

**RH:** It's the same with faith. Some people say they believe in this religion, but they don't believe completely. They accept what they want to believe, then they add their own ideas and start twisting the teachings. Eventually, both your faith and the religion itself will collapse.

As I mentioned earlier, the direction of an organization in this society and how it progresses matters. It doesn't matter what kind of organization it is. It is foolish to think that you can escape the repercussions of bad judgment and bad choices. Faith is very important in this society. True faith is like the beautiful lotus flower that grows out of the mud but does not get dirty. Having this kind of faith is extremely important.

**Question:** How do you know what the right thing is? Some people say, “this is right.” Others say, “No this is right.” Or “What you are doing with your life is wrong, or not a good idea.” For instance, the presidents were lying, but they thought they were doing the right thing that would benefit the country. But the result of their actions was a disaster. You said there would be true world peace if everyone practiced Namumyōhōrengekyō. But how people practice may be different from how they think, or how they carry out their lives.

**RH:** The Lotus Sutra teaches that everybody is equal—all life is equal. Shakyamuni first taught the Lotus Sutra in India. At that time, the country of India had a caste system. There was no equality amongst the people. Shakyamuni wanted to rid the country of such inequality through Buddhism by teaching that everyone was equal. While he was alive, that teaching spread throughout India and was accepted. But after he passed away, the caste system was reinstated because, at that time, it was easier for people to live within a system of inequality. When the Buddha was alive and people followed him, there was prosperity. But after he passed away, the country declined. So, even if the correct teaching exists, if people won’t study, practice, and follow through with the correct teachings, the teachings won’t take root and be sustained.

Even if politicians think not only of their honor and popularity, but also think about their own people, it is just not sufficient. Besides, even when they are thinking about their own people, they are sometimes assassinated by their own people. But after sixty or one hundred years pass, history reveals that these leaders were only thinking about their own people and their own country and not giving any thought to peoples of other countries or other regions. And when the people of their country also began thinking in the same way, they were on a track heading in the wrong direction.

In some Moslem traditions women have to wear the hijab, and in some countries women were not granted the right to drive until recently. In another country, an Islamic woman dancer who made video of herself dancing and broadcast it on You-Tube, was arrested for what was considered an offense against Islam. When I heard news of these events I was astounded because in Buddhism we believe that men and women should be equal. We believe that the equality of everyone is truly important. But that is not true in Islam. That is not their belief. In some Islamic countries, women believe that not being equal is happiness. For instance, in France, Moslem women protested for the right to wear the hijab to school after the French government banned it. While the women wanted to regain their rights to wear what they wanted, from my point of view the hijab is also a symbol of discrimination because the women of Islam have to hide themselves. Or because they have come to believe that the only way to show their devotion is to wear the hijab. Yet, from the point of view of these women, they are

being discriminated against for not being permitted to exercise their freedom to wear what they want. So, with this example you can see the different views of what is happiness.

**Question:** Is world peace when we seek to understand each other and not judge each other? Also, when we are compassionate even to those who do us harm because we understand that everyone is doing the best that they can with their karma, is this what world peace is about? What does peace really mean? Is it peace in the individual's heart?

**RH:** Buddhism does not permit violence, deny other people, look down on others or, the worst of all denials, kill other people. None of this is acceptable in True Buddhism. The only thing that we accept is discussion. Yet, even in discussion there must not be an argument. It's not about winning or losing a discussion. It's about listening to another person and allowing that person to speak their truth, and you speak your truth or reveal the truth. And about no one feeling wronged. If you do not have that basic rule, then peace will never be achieved. If the discussion becomes an argument or violent, that is against Buddhism, and peace will never be achieved. If you are not able to embrace the other person's ideas, then just gradually change the subject. That is the Buddhist way.

**Question:** Is the seed planted <sup>11</sup>even when you can't embrace the other person's point of view because it is diametrically opposed to your view, and the other person expresses his view so strongly?

**RH:** If you can make your point, which is to reveal the truth, you are planting the seed. However, sometimes you are made to feel like a complete idiot in a discussion, which is something I totally hate. The other person shouts at you and calls you stupid and other names. Then that is considered violence and is not right, and the discussion is going the wrong way. On the other hand, even if you both realize that each other's point of view is different and you are not embracing the other's point of view, but you both are able to utter your truths during the discussion, then that is planting the seed. Still, if the other person becomes violent during the discussion, yet you were able to utter the truth, even so the seed is planted. You made a connection between the Law and that person.

Because we chant Namumyōhōrengekyō, and SGI, whose notoriety is well-known, also chants Namumyōhōrengekyō, people assume we are members of SGI. That causes immediate resentment and problems for us.

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<sup>11</sup> The seed planted – telling someone about Namumyōhōrengekyō, or telling them that they have Buddha nature, or that all life is equal and has Buddha nature.



**DEVELOPING FAITH**  
**REVEREND RAIDO HIROTA**  
**TRENTON, NEW JERSEY**  
**JULY 20, 2018**

**QUESTION: How does one recognize obstacles to one's practice?**

**RH:** It's about faith. To study Namumyōhōrengekyō is to learn about life. The study of the teaching of Namumyōhōrengekyō is to learn about what is the foundation of our life. It is very important to learn about your life. It's all about fighting against your laziness. If you don't study and learn, you will never understand how important and precious faith is. And eventually you may walk away from the faith.

You shouldn't be tricked by the usual form of practice. By that I mean, just practicing—just chanting. Chanting without studying and learning about faith—without learning the teachings. Without learning how honorable, sacred, and good these teachings are, and how noble this faith is, you will never come to understand the story or full scope of your faith and your life.

In our temple in Japan, there is a believer who doesn't come to the temple very often to pray. The believer said openly to me, "I feel bad when I come to the temple because I don't come often. And because of this I know the priest is going to be mad at me."

Yes, it is important for believers to come to the temple as many times as possible to expand their faith and understanding of the teachings. But what I told this believer was that coming to the temple and learning about this faith is not for me. It's for yourself. You are practicing because and for yourself. For your life. For now, this believer has stopped saying he comes because he feels bad. I hope that means he is coming because he wants to learn about these good teachings and about faith. Every time I hear stories about your faith, I pray that everyone's faith will grow deeper and deeper.



**SHITEI IKKA AND NIMPŌ IKKA**  
**REVEREND RAIDŌ HIROTA**  
**TRENTON, NEW JERSEY**  
**JULY 20, 2018**

**QUESTION:** What is the correct understanding of the *ikka* as in *shitei-ikka* and *nimpo-ikka*? Does it mean “uniqueness”? or “unity”? or “union”? Sometimes, when translating from English to Italian the word *ikka* translates as “unity or union” {two elements that unite or merge, like the master and disciple, or the Law with the person. In other cases, it is translated as “uniqueness,” where the Law is unique or singular, and the person is unique or singular. Will these translation differences create problems for me in understanding the teachings?

**RH:** *Ikkā* = *ikkō* and means two things merging to become one. In Buddhism, the condition necessary for merging two things into one is faith—belief. If you don’t have faith, you can’t make two things one.

*Nimpō ikka* means a human being and the Law are one. *Shitei ikka* means the teacher and the disciple are one. These two concepts are completely different. They cannot be combined.

To explain *nimpō ikka*: *pō* = *hō* or Law, which is the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. *Nim* (or *nin*) is a person—a human being. Us. We, ourselves. We believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō, and believe that every life is the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō. By believing in Namumyōhōrengekyō, we are bringing together, or merging ourselves with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

To explain *shitei ikka*: as I explained earlier, Nichiren Daishonin is the True Buddha (*Honbutsu*). *Shi* comes from the word *shisho* and means teacher—Nichiren Daishonin. *Tei* means believers. The model of *shitei ikka* is the Atsuhara farmers who were persecuted for their belief in Namumyōhōrengekyō. The concept of *shitei ikka* was first recognized by Nichiren Daishonin himself. In 1279 the Atsuhara farmers had just begun their practice of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Their background, education and life experiences were quite different from Nichiren Daishonin’s, and yet they held fast to their faith, continuing to believe even after the shogun government imprisoned, tortured and threatened them with execution if they didn’t renounce the faith. Not one of them recanted, but eventually the government executed three of the farmers. Nichiren Daishonin realized that despite their differences, he and the

farmers had the same faith and were willing to give their lives to protect the Law. Thus, he realized that he, the teacher, and the Atsuhara farmers, the believers, were one. Namumyōhōrengkyō was the center of Nichiren Daishonin's heart and mind, and he realized that Namumyōhōrengkyō was the center of their hearts and minds as well. This was *shitei ikka*. The Daishonin and the farmers were one.

*Nimpo ikka* is related to the Tatsunokuchi Persecution. In September 1271 Nichiren Daishonin was condemned to die. In the middle of the night he was taken to Tatsunokuchi just outside of Kamakura to be executed. But because a meteor flashed across the sky and lit up the gruesome scene frightening the executioners, the execution was cancelled and his life was spared. Instead, he was exiled to Sado Island. At that moment, Nichiren Daishonin had the realization that he had Namumyōhōrengkyō inside him. He realized that Namumyōhōrengkyō was the life of the Buddha, and he realized that he, a human being, was one with the Law of Namumyōhōrengkyō. This was the moment of his enlightenment and the realization that he was the True Buddha who manifested the Law within himself. At that moment, the human being and the Law merged and became *Nimpo ikka*, the oneness of the person and the Law.

Considering *nimpo ikka* and *shitei ikka*, *nimpo ikka* is about the world of Nichiren Daishonin, and *shitei ikka* is about the Atsuhara Persecution. At the time of the Atsuhara Persecution, three farmers died protecting their faith. Nichiren Daishonin realized that even if it was only one person who had died protecting their faith, everyone and anyone could be like that and have that kind of faith. Then everyone could be Buddha. These two teachings, which explain how two different things can become one, are the main teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. *Shitei ikka* is being one with the teacher, Nichiren Daishonin. *Nimpo ikka* is being one with the Law of Namumyōhōrengkyō

"Uniqueness" is the wrong translation. The correct translation is synchronicity, when two things synchronize.



# THE SOUL OF BUDDHA AFTER DEATH

And

## OTHER QUESTIONS

REVEREND RAIDO HIROTA

TRENTON, NEW JERSEY

JULY 20, 2018

**QUESTION:** What happens to the spirit of a Buddha after death? When the physical life of Buddhas (Nichiren Daishonin, Shakyamuni) end, do their spirit lives merge back into the universe and become a part of the whole great ocean for new lives to draw upon? Once one becomes a Buddha, are they always reborn as Buddha, or something else?

**RH:** As I mentioned earlier, our life and all life are connected. If we view all life as the big ocean, our life is one drop in that big ocean. When our life ends, that one drop returns to the big ocean, merges with it and spreads throughout. And while you are in the big ocean, you will encounter different connections or create different relationships relative to the karma created, and a new life is formed. This is true for all life.

When a person, who had a good life helping others, and being good to other life, dies and returns to the big ocean, that person's good deeds will spread throughout the big ocean and have a positive influence on the entire ocean of life. Likewise, when a person who has done bad things such as committing murder, or other things dies and returns to the deep ocean of life, that person's bad deeds will spread and have a negative influence on the great ocean of life. Therefore, if you have faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō, you are going to contribute the influence of Namumyōhōrengekyō into the vast ocean of life.



**QUESTION: Sometimes, even after practicing Gongyo<sup>12</sup> and chanting Odaimoku<sup>13</sup>, I feel I am not respectful towards other people. How do I resolve this situation?**

**RH:** I have been practicing for a long time, but I feel the same way. During my long history of practicing, I have sometimes felt, before I start Gongyo, that I really didn't want to practice – I really didn't want to do Gongyo. But when I went ahead and did it, I always felt better for doing it. And during this long history of practice, I have occasionally wondered what this kind of life means; and if there is any good in what I do. But I practice – and I have to practice. Even a person like me, who thinks this way, has the life of Buddha inside them. I have been encouraged by that teaching. Thus, I have been repeating the Odaimoku of Namumyōhōrengekyō over and over, and this is how I have been living my life for most of my life. This is my confession.



**QUESTION: In the Hoben chapter it says, “to open the door of the wisdom of the Buddha to all living beings.” How do we do this in our life time? Does it mean to give examples from the way we live our life? Or does it mean to plant the seed by speaking of the teachings so that a connection can be created between the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and all living things?**

**RH:** This quote means to open the door of doubt. If you can't open the door of doubt, you can't really see the true wisdom. This is what is explained in the Hoben (2<sup>nd</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

Whenever you have the attitude of competition, win or lose, gaining benefit, or fear of losing benefit, pitting strong against weak, and constantly comparing, these are actually not true conditions. They are actually reflecting the doubt in your life. You must realize that if you are constantly competing or comparing you are actually expressing doubt. It is very important for you to realize this.

If you think, “I am the center of everything,” or “I am most superior,” the teachings of Buddha will never come into your mind. It is difficult to deny your true self. Unless you realize your foolishness, your dishonesty and that you are not the center of everything, the teachings of Buddha will never enter your heart and mind.

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<sup>12</sup> Gongyo - the practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which entails the morning and evening recitation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō.

<sup>13</sup> Ōdaimoku – Ō=venerable. Daimoku is the title of a sutra; Ōdaimoku is the invocation of the venerable title of the Lotus Sutra or Namumyōhōrengekyō.



**QUESTION: Regarding the celebration of Urabon<sup>14</sup>. I discovered this holiday after reading and studying the Goshos “The Origin of Urabon,” and “About the Urabon”. How can a believer, who lives far from the temple, celebrate this commemoration of the dead on July 15? How is the ceremony performed?**

**RH:** Buddhism originated in India. It traveled from India to China and ended up in Japan. While it traveled through these countries it was influenced by the different cultures and traditions. Because Buddhism recognized eternal life, one of the traditions shared in Buddhism is worshipping people who had passed away, otherwise known as ancestor worship.

In Japanese tradition, there are three days when the deceased are worshipped: the spring equinox (March 20), the autumn equinox (September 22), and July 15. Because Buddhism teaches that all life is equal, the spring and fall equinoxes, where day and night are of equal length, represent that balance or that equality. They also symbolize a pivotal point, or a point of transition or change, as is the case with death.

The ceremony consists of writing the name of the deceased on the front of a *toba* (a wooden plank). On the back, you write a wish for the deceased. The *toba* is then placed on the altar in front of Gohonzon<sup>15</sup>, and you chant for the enlightenment of the deceased, and quietly in your mind think about the deceased and the wish you have for them.

In Japan, we make one *toba* per family. The ancestors of an entire family are represented on that one *toba*. This is different from the United States and Italy, where the individual, or perhaps two people are represented. In a Japanese cemetery, there is a plot for the entire family, and all past generations are worshipped. On our *toba* “Hirota Family” is written. We don't write each person's name. There are many people in my family that I don't know, but because we are all connected I worship all family members.



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<sup>14</sup> Urabon – a festival, held on July 15, where offerings are made to the three treasures (the Buddha, the Law, and the priests) for the benefit of the deceased.

<sup>15</sup> Gohonzon – the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which represents the universal Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and the Buddha nature in all things.

# OESHIKI

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REVEREND RAIDŌ HIROTA  
SANBO-IN TEMPLE  
FUKUYAMA CITY, JAPAN

The Ōeshiki ceremony is the most important Buddhist service, for it celebrates Nichiren Daishonin's eternal life as well as the eternal Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Having an Ōeshiki service deepens our faith.

During Gongyo, just after the *Ni-setsu-gē-gon* passage of the *Juryo* chapter, and just before the *Jiga-gē*, stop the recitation of the sutra and read in a loud voice a passage of the *Risshō Ankoku Ron*<sup>16</sup> from, "*The host exclaimed with delight: As the proverb says, the dove has changed into a hawk, the sparrow into a clam!*" to the end of the gosho.

In a formal Ōeshiki ceremony the shakubuku<sup>17</sup> letter written to the Kamakura government by ninth High Priest Nichiū Shōnin, Nichiren Daishonin's *Risshō Ankoku Ron*, Daishōnin's shakubuku letter to the Kamakura government, the shakubuku letter of second High Priest Nikkō Shōnin to the Kamakura government, the shakubuku letter of third High Priest Nichimoku Shōnin to the Kamakura government, the shakubuku letter of fourth High Priest Nichidō Shōnin to the Kamakura government, and the shakubuku letter to the Kamakura government by fifth High Priest Nichigyō Shōnin are read in front of the Gohonzon by the priests one after another in this order. This is done so that we do not change this faith after Nichiren Daishōnin's death. No matter what the time period, it must be paramount that we work for the sake of *kōsen-rūfū*<sup>18</sup> and the enlightenment of all living beings.

You should make paper cherry blossoms and decorate the left and right sides of the altar, specifically because even though Nichiren Daishōnin died in autumn—the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month—cherry blossoms bloomed throughout the country. The lotus flower symbolizes the teachings of Shakyamuni of India. 2000 years after his death, during the Latter Day of the

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<sup>16</sup> *Risshō Ankoku Ron* – "Securing the Peace of Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism". One of the major writings of Nichiren Daishonin in which he explains to the ruling clan that in order for the country to be peaceful and secure, the people need to abandon their faith in erroneous teachings and embrace the True Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

<sup>17</sup> Shakubuku - a method of propagating Buddhism by directly leading a person to the True Law and refuting erroneous views.

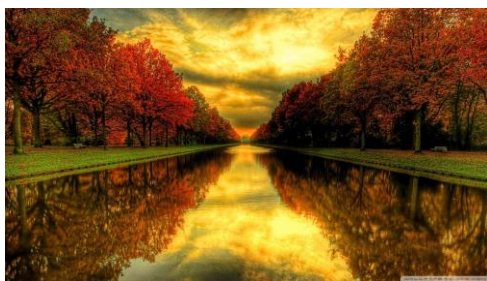
<sup>18</sup> *Kosen-rufu* - to widely declare and spread True Buddhism.

Law Buddhism came to Japan where the essence of Buddhism was elucidated by Nichiren Daishōnin. The cherry blossom symbolizes the passage of true Buddhism to Japan.



The photograph to the left shows a vase of paper cherry blossoms on the altar at Sanbo-in Temple in Fukuyama City, Japan. From the Buddhist perspective, the body of the vase in which the flowers are placed symbolize the Law of Buddhism and is representative of Mt. Sumeru.<sup>19</sup> The height of Mt. Sumeru is 84,000 *yojana*<sup>20</sup> above sea level, and 84,000 *yojana* below sea level. One of the decorations on the vase (not clearly visible) illustrates the stars in the heavens. Another decoration represents the waves which surround Mt. Sumeru. And a third symbol represents the mountains. These three symbols surround the flowers in the cone of the vase. The three colorful belts encircling the vase which support Mt. Sumeru represent the gold wheel, the water wheel, and the wind wheel. The white mountain-shaped papers surrounding the base of the vase symbolize Mt. Sumeru's seven surrounding mountains and seven oceans. In the sea surrounding the seventh gold mountain there are 4 continents. The southernmost continent is Jambudvīpa<sup>21</sup> where humans live. If you are not born into this world of Jambudvīpa, you cannot connect with Buddhist teachings. The cherry blossoms decorating the summit of Mt. Sumeru symbolize *kōsen rūfū*<sup>22</sup> and the enlightenment of all living beings.

In Nichiren Shōshū Buddhism, we do not offer colorful flowers to Gohonzon, except at Oeshiki. You may leave the flowers decorating the altar until the end of the year. Then, in order to avoid the misunderstanding that Nichiren Shōshū decorates the Gohonzon with colorful flowers, at the end of the year please destroy and throw the cherry blossoms away.



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<sup>19</sup> Mt. Sumeru – in ancient Indian cosmology Sumeru was the highest mountain in the center of the world.

<sup>20</sup> Yojana - 1 *yojana* (an Indian measurement) is 7-9 miles

<sup>21</sup> Jambudvīpa – in ancient Indian cosmology it is one of the four continents surrounding Mt. Sumeru.

<sup>22</sup> *Kōsen rūfū* – to widely declare and spread True Buddhism.



# GOSHO SELECTION

## ON ATTAINING BUDDHAHOOD<sup>23</sup>

If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured through eternity and attain supreme enlightenment in this lifetime, you must awaken to the mystic truth which has always been within your life. This truth is Myōhōrengekyō. Chanting Myōhōrengekyō will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth within you. Myōhōrengekyō is the king of sutras, flawless in both letter and principle. Its words are the reality of life, and the reality of life is the Mystic Law (*myoho*). It is called the Mystic Law because it explains the mutually inclusive relationship of life and all phenomena. That is why this sutra is the wisdom of all Buddhas.

Life at each moment encompasses both body and spirit and both self and environment of all sentient beings in every condition of life<sup>24</sup>, as well as insentient beings -- plants, sky and earth, on down to the most minute particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the universe and is revealed in all phenomena. One awakened to this truth himself embodies this relationship. However, even though you chant and believe in Myōhōrengekyō, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but some inferior teaching. "Inferior teachings" means those other than this sutra, which are all provisional and transient. No provisional teaching leads directly to enlightenment, and without the direct path to enlightenment you cannot attain Buddhahood, even if you practice lifetime after lifetime for countless aeons. Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime is then impossible. Therefore, when you chant the Mystic Law and recite the Lotus Sutra, you must summon up deep conviction that Myōhōrengekyō is your life itself.

You must never seek any of Shakyamuni's teachings or the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the universe outside yourself. Your mastery of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of mortal sufferings in the least unless you perceive the nature of your own life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, any discipline or good deed will be meaningless. For example, a poor man cannot earn a penny just by counting his neighbor's wealth, even if he does so night

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<sup>23</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 1 p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> In every condition of life - in any of the Ten Worlds or *ichinen sanzen*.

and day. That is why Miao-lo states, "Unless one perceives the nature of his life, he cannot eradicate his evil karma."<sup>25</sup> He means here that unless one perceives the nature of his life, his practice will become an endless, painful austerity. Miao-lo therefore condemns such students of Buddhism as non-Buddhist. He refers to the passage in the *Maka Shikan*, "Although they study Buddhism, their views revert to those of non-Buddhists."

Whether you chant the Buddha's name<sup>26</sup>, recite the sutra or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits in your life. With this conviction you should put your faith into practice. For example, the *Jomyo* Sutra says the Buddha's enlightenment is to be found in human life, thus showing that common mortals can attain Buddhahood and that the sufferings of birth and death can be transformed into nirvana. It further states that if the minds of the people are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds.

It is the same with a Buddha and a common mortal. While deluded, one is called a common mortal, but once enlightened, he is called a Buddha. Even a tarnished mirror will shine like a jewel if it is polished. A mind which presently is clouded by illusions originating from the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but once it is polished it will become clear, reflecting the enlightenment of immutable truth. Arouse deep faith and polish your mirror night and day. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō.

What then does *myo* signify? It is simply the mysterious nature of our lives from moment to moment, which the mind cannot comprehend nor words express. When you look into your own mind at any moment, you perceive neither color nor form to verify that it exists. Yet you still cannot say it does not exist, for many differing thoughts continually occur to you. Life is indeed an elusive reality that transcends both the words and concepts of existence and nonexistence. It is neither existence nor nonexistence, yet exhibits the qualities of both. It is the mystic entity of the Middle Way that is the reality of all things. *Myo* is the name given to the mystic nature of life, and ho to its manifestations.

*Renge*, the lotus flower, symbolizes the wonder of this Law. Once you realize that your own life is the Mystic Law, you will realize that so are the lives of all others. That realization is the mystic *kyo*, or sutra. It is the king of sutras, the direct path to enlightenment, for it explains that the entity of our minds, from which spring both good and evil, is in fact the entity of the Mystic Law. If you have deep faith in this truth and chant Myōhōrengekyō, you are certain to

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<sup>25</sup> *Maka Shikan Bugyoden Guketsu*, Vol. 4

<sup>26</sup> Buddha's name - as used here it means Namumyōhōrengekyō.

attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. That is why the sutra states, "After my death, you must embrace this sutra. Those who do so shall travel the straight road to Buddhahood."<sup>27</sup> Never doubt in the slightest, but keep your faith and attain enlightenment in this lifetime. Namumyōhōrengekyō, Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Respectfully,

Nichiren

1255

Toki Jonin



# Happy Oeshiki

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<sup>27</sup> Lotus Sutra, chapter 21.

# How to Make Simple Cherry Blossoms

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Reprinted from "DIY Cherry Blossoms" by Kara

At [creationsbykara.com](http://creationsbykara.com)

## SUPPLIES:

- Tissue paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Branches or dowels

## INSTRUCTIONS:

1-Stack several pieces of tissue on top of each other and cut out a flower shape. It does not need to be perfect! Mine were about 2 1/2" across and had five petals, but it doesn't really matter that much. I wanted to do two colors, but you can just do one. And because I know a few of you are bound to notice. . . yes, my light pink paper has words on it. But it's all I had and I knew once it was all scrunched up they wouldn't show. Which they don't. Thank goodness.



2-For two-toned cherry blossoms, stack two flowers on top of each other with the petals not matched up.



3-Now just scrunch the flower petals up and twist the whole thing together at the bottom.



I thought it would be more realistic if there were variations in the blossoms, so I made some light pink, some dark pink, and some with the two colors together. To make smaller blossoms like the two on the left, just scrunch up one flower at a time.



4-Now it's time to glue them to your branches. I used branches that I pruned from our apple tree. If you don't have your own tree, check with your neighbors. You should be able to find some unwanted branches this time of year.

I think it looks best to apply the blossoms to the natural buds of the branch. Just add a tiny dab of hot glue, and press your blossom on.



Continue adding blossoms to all sides of your branches.





5-When you are all finished, just stick them in the container of your choice. I added some wheat at the bottom to hold them in place.



Happy Oeshiki