

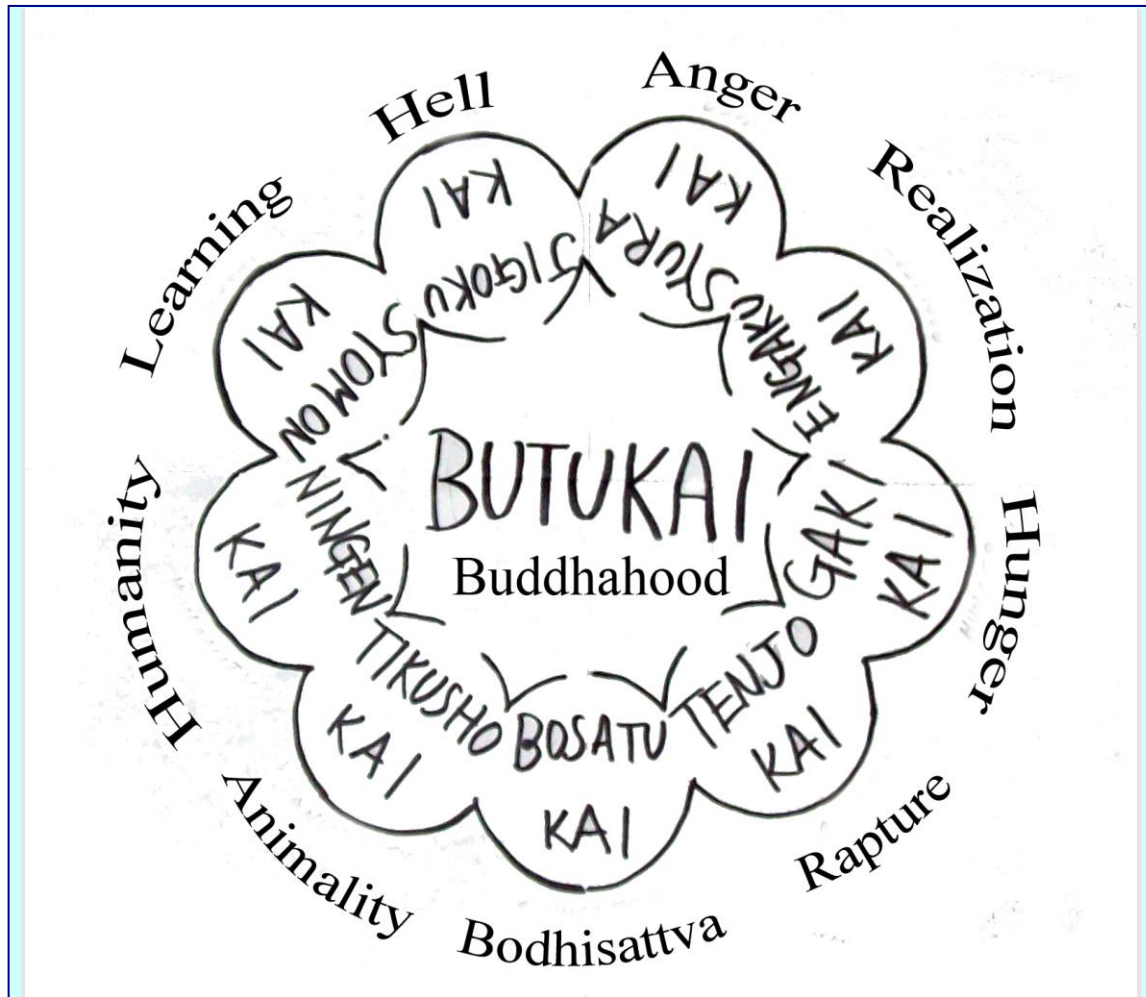
THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SPRING, SUMMER, AUTUMN

2015

THE MUTUAL POSSESSION OF THE TEN WORLDS¹



¹ Mutual possession of the Ten Worlds (*jikkaigogu*) – each of the Ten Worlds contains the potential for all ten within itself, which means that life is not fixed in any one of the Ten Worlds, but can manifest any of the Ten Worlds, including Buddhahood, at any given moment.

Simply
QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

(DOES NOT INCLUDE FURTHER DISCUSSION)

Reverend Raidō Hirota

Lambertville, New Jersey

June 2015

QUESTION: What does it mean to see through the Buddha's eyes, and to see things not as they appear, but as they really are?

Reverend Hirota (RH): To see your own life, the lives of others, the life of all living things, all life in the Ten Worlds² with the life of the world of Buddha at the center. You also don't think in a very selfish and arrogant way, such as thinking you own your own life.

QUESTION: Some believers think that because they practice they are special, and though they believe in the law of cause and effect, they feel they can still do anything and be protected. I think this thinking is a carry-over from the Soka Gakkai³. What is the correct viewpoint and stance as a believer in Nichiren Daishonin's⁴ True Buddhism?

RH: The way the Soka Gakkai thinks is that 'their believers are the chosen, correct, and superior people. Non-believers are enemies and poison.' This is exactly what the leaders of the organization teach and it is the true nature itself of the Soka Gakkai.

The real Law of Nichiren Daishonin says that we human beings, who can't get rid of doubts, are more or less ignorant, weak, vulgar and narrow minded, and there is no perfect God or Buddha in this world. As we are very ignorant, we need the True Law, and we should not think that believers are superior.

QUESTION: On the other hand, considering the time we live in and the place where we live (in the West, far removed from the center of True Buddhism) it is extraordinary that we practice at all. Are we pioneers? What is the significance of our time and place? And what is our responsibility?

RH: From Sado to Minobu is 300 km (186.4 miles) in a straight line. It was a 12-day journey by foot for young people (and if you were elderly, it took more than 20 days). There is no guarantee of a healthy and safe return once you left home. You had to make up your mind as once you left, there was the possibility of you getting sick, lost, falling dead by the roadsides,

² Ten Worlds - potential conditions of life inherent in each individual. They are: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven or Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddhahood.

³ Soka Gakkai - SGI – Soka Gakkai International – a lay organization that wrongly incorporates some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism into its own philosophy and practice.

⁴ Nichiren Daishonin - (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Mystic Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

or being robbed of all your money by bandits. Japan is a small country, but it is only flat by the seashores. Once you go inland, there is undulating terrain with mountains and rivers. The real distance from Sado to Minobu was probably more than 400 km (248.5 miles). Despite this, Abutsubo (who was 91) and other people from Sado journeyed to seek the Law of Buddhahood for all living beings (*Issai shujyō jōbutsu*) from Nichiren Daishonin. And they brought back what they had learned and delivered it to local believers. They made particular effort to help illiterate people, to learn together and practice together. That attitude towards life remains with us in the Gosho⁵. We can worship now by using the Gosho as a key. Compared to the Kamakura era, the life we live now in this modern era is convenient. But there is still plenty of room to make more efforts.

QUESTION: Is there consciousness in death?

RH: All lives are a mass of many cells (while alive). Also the state of 'death', when doctor's judge that the brain and heart have stopped, is a standard which human beings have created. But life stays unchanged forever. Because you had a past life, that is why you are born in this modern world with a life. That means, your life will be connected to the future after you die. Yesterday, today and tomorrow (past, present and future) are all the same. Whether you have consciousness as a human being or not, even though you can't communicate your consciousness, life exists no matter what, even though it is defined as death and life. From the eyes of humans plants, water, soil and light don't have any consciousness. However those lives have will and Buddha-nature. It is not only in this current life.

QUESTION: How does one "pray" as a Nichiren Buddhist? Is it "asking," "commanding," or saying "affirmations"?

RH: Reciting the Lotus Sutra and chanting Odaimoku⁶ is not a means to make a wish come true. It is for you to feel and realize the Buddha-nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō⁷ in the center of your life.

If your prayer is connecting with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, Buddha will protect you, even though you forget to pray, or you don't feel the necessity to pray, or something unpredictable is happening. However, if your prayer is not meeting or connecting with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, even though you pray many times, the prayer won't reach the Buddha, and it will come back to you as misfortune to let you know you are praying incorrectly.

It is not how you pray; it is all up to your way of life as a believer and whether you are meeting the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

QUESTION: Since I am not supposed to chant for things, but instead to focus my chanting on raising my Buddha nature, what do I need to do to get conspicuous benefits?

⁵ Gosho - - the individual and collective writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

⁶ Odaimoku - Daimoku - chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

⁷ Namumyōhōrengekyō - the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

- a. When am I supposed to "pray" in Nichiren Buddhism, since I am not to do so while chanting?

RH: When you do Gongyo⁸ in front of Gohonzon⁹ that is one practice or training. Each aspect of your life--your daily life, including your work--is real Gongyo. If you only focus on the Buddha nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō when you are doing the practice or training of Gongyo, and forget the Buddha nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō when you are not in front of Gohonzon (or your altar), then you are separating the real Gongyo and practice. Rather than praying, you need to make an effort to practice (or train) doing the real Gongyo, and view the real Gongyo as practice or training. It is more important to live with the mind of Namumyōhōrengekyō daily.

QUESTION: When I pray for everyone's enlightenment, what am I to think or feel or picture in my mind?

RH: Just as you can't eat, take a bath or go to the bathroom for others, for everyone's enlightenment, the best thing is for everyone to believe. To teach this is Shakubuku¹⁰.

Even though you pray for others to have belief, nothing will change even if you pray for a hundred years, unless you take action by making a phone call, writing a letter and delivering your thoughts. To pray means you have to direct yourself to both pray and take action jointly.

QUESTION: I find it difficult to sustain chanting Daimoku because chanting to feel that everything is okay (which is my interpretation of the Buddha nature) I don't trust that I'm doing enough, nor trust that I am doing it correctly. What should I do?

RH: This is how Nichiren Daishonin taught practitioners of the Lotus Sutra: "Consider this, if the believer of the Lotus Sutra does not abandon his faith, harbor false views, or begrudge his life, and wholeheartedly devotes his life to the golden words of the Lotus Sutra, then certainly, not only in the next life, but in this lifetime as well he will overcome severe difficulty, prolong his life, realize the great good fortune of unsurpassed enlightenment, and accomplish the great vow of *kosen-rufu*—the widespread propagation of True Buddhism." (Kitokyo Okuri-jo (*Gosho Zenshu* 1357p)

It is important to believe the teaching of Lotus Sutra and practice the Buddha's golden words.

⁸ Gongyo - the daily practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which entails the morning and evening recitation of the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō.

⁹ Gohonzon - the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which represents the universal Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and the Buddha nature in all things.

¹⁰ Shakabuku - a method of propagating Buddhism by directly leading a person to the True Law and refuting erroneous views.

QUESTION: Throughout the Gosho Daishonin refers to Shakyamuni¹¹ as our “Lord Shakyamuni Buddha” who attained enlightenment in the infinite past. Why is there no prayer or acknowledgement of Shakyamuni in Gongyo?

RH: The Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō is the Law that enlightened Shakyamuni. To worship the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō is the same as to respect Shakyamuni. There is a phrase in the 19th chapter of the Lotus Sutra which says, ‘In this, the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, there exists the remains of the enlightened one.’

People in the world will worship anything if it represents Shakyamuni. However, Nichiren Daishonin only respected Shakyamuni who preached the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, *Namushakyamunibutsu* is written on Gohonzon to show respect for Shakyamuni. Nichiren Daishonin didn't despise Shakyamuni. After all, Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra. But in *Sanzen-jin-tengo* (an immensely long period of time ago), Daituchisho Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra. He had sixteen sons, and the sixteenth child became Shakyamuni in a later life. All sixteen sons, including Shakyamuni became messengers who performed *Daitsu-fukō*, which means to only preach to people a restatement of the Lotus Sutra as was learned from the father Daituchisho-Butsu. Again, this is due to the connection (*en*) to the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni established when he received the teachings from his father Daituchisho-Butsu. (This can be found in Chapter seven of the Lotus Sutra, “Parable of the Magic City).

Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra, but he was not an acolyte of the Lotus Sutra, and of course he was not an acolyte of the Lotus Sutra who practiced what he learned from the Lotus Sutra during the time of Latter day of the Law (*Mappo* - which began 2000 years after Shakyamuni's death.) That is why we say Nichiren Daishonin is the True Buddha (*Honbutsu*) and Shakyamuni as the provisional Buddha (*Shakubutsu*). The Law of Nichiren Daishonin doesn't include Shakyamuni in its silent prayers of Gongyo, as the current era where we live is focused on the Latter Day of the Law (*Mappo*)¹².

QUESTION: What would be an example of Buddha within the lower realms?

(One of the concepts in our Buddhism is that there are 10 worlds or realms (*jikkai*). Buddhahood exists in all of these realms. Therefore Buddhahood also exists in the four lower worlds (*shiakushu*)¹³. Please give examples of Buddhahood in the *shiakushu*?)

RH: In Buddhism, not only human beings, but all lives in the universe have the life of Buddhahood at the very center of each of their lives surrounded, like a circle, by the nine Worlds of Hell, Hunger, Animality, Arrogance, Humanity, Rapture, Learning, Realization, and Bodhisattva.

Buddhism also preaches that because of their karma, they will start reversing themselves, hitting each other randomly like billiards, and live by changing their minds and body. This is called *Jikkaigogu* (the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds). *Gogu* means, there are ten worlds in the world of Hell, ten worlds in the world of Hunger, and so on, all the way

¹¹ Shakyamuni - Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029BCE – 949BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism on this earth.

¹² Latter Day of the Law – *Mappo* - This present time period which began in 1052, about 2000 years after the death of Shakyamuni. It is called the evil age.

¹³ Four Lower Worlds (*shiakushu*) - Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger.

to the realm of Buddhahood. That is why it is called *Jikkaigogu* – the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

However, Buddhahood in the world of Hell is a spirit reincarnated and living in the nine outer Worlds but based in the world of Hell.

The life of Buddhahood in the world of Hell is instantaneous, but it is not a Buddhahood that lasts a long time, and is not permanent. Buddhahood in the world of Hunger and Buddhahood in the world of Animality are the same. We need to repeat the instantaneous feeling of Buddhahood many times, and aim for a permanent enlightenment based on Buddhahood in the center.

QUESTION: Please explain the 3rd prayer in Gongyo. Particularly when it says to offer a debt of gratitude to the High Priest.

RH: From Nichiren Daishonin's time to now, many believers have been introduced to the Law by practicing. We pray for successive chief priests as a representative of the faith.

QUESTION: Omosu Seminary-Kitayama Honmonji is where Nikko Shonin lived and taught Buddhism. It is where he is buried. He designated 6 disciples. Why is this temple not affiliated with Taisekiji?

RH: Nikko Shonin worked with Nichimoku Shonin for nine years to build and cultivate a foundation at Taisekiji, and once the temple was established he built Omosudanjo (currently Kitayama Honmonji) to specifically focus on training young disciples. He stayed there for 35 years until his death. Omosudanjo was very close to Taisekiji. They helped each other amicably, and there was no conflict between them.

QUESTION: Do we ever prostrate ourselves in front of Gohonzon?
(Do we ever perform a deep bow from a kneeling position where we bow our heads so that the forehead touches the floor while our hands face palms upward?)

RH: The only way to bow when you worship Gohonzon in Nichiren Shoshu¹⁴ is when you raise the upper arms in front of the body and put both hands together to pray. We don't hold our palms upward and we don't bow and touch our heads to the floor. That is the style of a different religion.

QUESTION: In the goshō Nichiren Daishonin mentioned that he prayed to the *shoten zenjin*¹⁵. My question is how should we view the *shoten zenjin*? Should we view them as actual beings that live in another realm?

¹⁴ Nichiren Shoshu – a sect of Buddhism that embraces and recites the true Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō as the original cause of enlightenment and believes in Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

¹⁵ Shoten zenjin – Buddhist gods – forces of nature that are not explicable, can't be seen and are not scientifically proven.

¹⁵ Lotus Sutra – the highest teaching that 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

RH: The existence of *Shoten Zenjin* is described in the Sutra, with each god having its role. However, since it is hard to describe an existence such as the god of wind or the god of thunder, they are incarnated and expressed as gods dominated by *Shotenzen*. The ways of nature are all connected and are a part of the whole.

QUESTION: Daibonten and Taishakuten are known as Brahma and Indra from Hinduism. What is the link between the Buddhist gods (*shoten zenjin*) and the Hindu deities that Buddhism has incorporated into its belief?

RH: Hindu and Buddhism both interpret Taishakuten in their own way. There are no connections.

QUESTION: I found this quote online from Nichikan Shonin¹⁶: “The Priest to whom we must devote our lives (Namu)...is Namu Nikko Shonin¹⁷, the Great Leader of the Propagation of the Essential Teachings, the general Head Priest of the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law, and the founder of the Temple who received the conferral of the Law, as well as the Master Nichimoku Shonin¹⁸, who transmitted the Law and who is the Head Priest of the entire world to which we devote our lives, ***as well as all of the successive masters, who are the direct successors to the conferral of the Law.” Could you please explain what it means, especially when there have been priests who have strayed from the correct teaching? How do I faithfully recite the silent prayer in Gongyo when there have been high priests that have gone astray? How do I express appreciation to those high priests that have strayed from the teachings?

RH: In the Lotus Sutra, there is a section in chapter 12 written about Devadatta¹⁹.

Devadatta was attractive, having an appearance that was superior to Shakyamuni. When people met Devadatta first, they thought he was Shakyamuni. Devadatta planned to kill Shakyamuni because he thought if he killed Shakyamuni and he himself became the leader, the religious community would prosper. Due to his evil action, Devadatta fell into hell while he was still alive. However, Shakyamuni visited Devadatta in hell and told him that he would be a Buddha called Heavenly King World-Honored One (Tennnonyorai) in the future as he had a relationship with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō while he was alive. Shakyamuni’s disciples criticized the Buddha and questioned why he assured future enlightenment for Devadatta, the one who had tried to kill him. Shakyamuni told them that ‘the current Devadatta was Ashisenninn who taught the Lotus Sutra to me as a master when I was training in the past. Right now Devadatta is in hell. If he realizes his foolish actions of

¹⁶ Nichikan Shonin – (1665-1726) 26th High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu, who was responsible for restoring the religion by reestablishing the correct and true teachings of Nichiren Daishonin after the religion had suffered many years of misinterpretation and misleading teachings.

¹⁷ Nikko Shonin – (1246-1333) 2nd High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu who received the transfer of the teachings directly from Nichiren Daishonin.

¹⁸ Nichimoku Shonin – (1260-1333) – 3rd high priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who inherited the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin from Nikko Shonin.

¹⁹ Devadatta - a cousin and disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha who later turned against the Buddha.

the past while he is suffering in hell, has remorse, and eliminates his evil mind, then there is no obstacle to him becoming enlightened due to his karmic connection to the Lotus Sutra. The Law exists equally within all lives. There is no absolute evil or absolute good in the world. From Hell to Buddhahood, existence has both evil and good in one life.'

All lives in the universe are incomplete, unenlightened beings. Some people will go off the path and some will betray. And you will come to understand what is right and what is evil just as you come to understand that because there is light, you will understand darkness, and because there is darkness, you will understand light. From that perspective, the one who betrays can turn misfortune into a good outcome (*Hendoku iyaku*). You should detest and correct your own sins, but you must not hate others.

Appreciation here means to learn from those high priests who made mistakes.

QUESTION: How can we do more shakubuku? We are aware that it is necessary to sow properly, but we have a hard time doing it.

RH: Whenever and wherever. Whomever you have a relationship, you should introduce the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō courageously even if it's only one word. How do you do Shakubuku? You just have to do Shakubuku. Some people ask me 'I can't do Gongyo. How can I do Gongyo?' And I will answer, you have to do Gongyo, that's it.

It is impossible for all people in the world to be aware of and believe in the Law of Nichiren Daishonin faithfully, but we can make a connection (*en*) for all the people in the world to the Law of Nichiren Daishonin.

QUESTION: Is the Gohonzon transcribed by Nittatsu Shonin²⁰ a complete representation of the Dai-Gohonzon, and are all the characters on the Nittatsu Shonin Gohonzon and the Dai-Gohonzon the characters mentioned in the Lotus Sutra? Are all the deities represented, including Kishibojin²¹?

RH: Basics are all the same, including the Gohonzon of Nichiren Daishonin, but sometimes there are some delicate retouchings and omissions.

All the elements of the Gohonzon are written in Lotus Sutra.

QUESTION: What are the requirements to establish a Temple in USA, in Italy, or in other parts of the world?

RH: A temple is a place for worship and training (a school and a place of practice). It will be hard to build a temple if there are no people who need it and support it permanently. It is just like society. A temple would only be a place of residence for a priest if he minimizes instructions of the Law because he has to support himself, or if a priest lacks time for preaching the Law to survive.

²⁰ Nittastu Shonin –(d. 1979) 66th High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu.

²¹ Kishibojin – (Kishimojin) – a female demon who, along with 10 of her daughters, in the 26th chapter of the Lotus Sutra pledged to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

At Sanbo-in, every month on the 1st, 13th and 19th, the believers visit the temple. We do Gongyo together, listen to the priest's sermon and study the Law of Nichiren Daishonin. Also, as for annual events, the believers visit the temple on January 1st (New Year's day), February 3rd, *Setsubun-e* (the start of spring), February 7th (Nikko Shonin's memorial day), February 16th (Nichiren Daishonin's birthday), March 21st (the spring equinox), April 28th, (*Rikkyokaishukai (Risshu-e)*), August 15th (*Urabon* - memorial for the deceased), September 12th (*Tatsunokuchi-hōnan-e* (Nichiren's near execution and subsequent realization of his true identity), September 23rd (autumn equinox), October 13th (Oeshiki), November 15th, (Nichimokushonin-e (memorial day)) and so on. In addition, memorial services will be held to support the operational costs of the temple, and living costs of the priests. A memorial service for ancestors, parents, brothers and sisters of believers are held on the anniversary of the first year, and the third, seventh, thirteenth and seventeenth years. Believers invite relatives, build a wooden tablet (*toba*), chant the sutra, visit the gravesite, and hold a special memorial service at the temple. Believers support the temple with memorial services and priests preach the Law to believers and honor the Law.

QUESTION: What consequences can happen to a person who has previously practiced other religions (Christianity-Catholic, Buddhist teachings of various schools, teachings of Soka Gakkai, Taisekiji School²², Minobu²³ and other various teachings)?

RH: There are many people who are happy and well respected in society who worship other religions other than the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. On the other hand, many believers of the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō have been criticized because they seem to be very unfortunate, unhappy, and very unpleasant, and they don't really show any good reason for someone to believe. The human personality is formed as the result of the many conditions one goes through: karma from the past before you were born, the environment of the parents, your family, and educational background when growing up. You won't be able to become a perfect human being in a short time period even though you have faith in this religion. It will be a practice that repeats being in doubt and having wisdom for a lifetime. That is why you can't stop having faith because you are unfortunate, or continue faith because you are fortunate. Only with the Law of Nichiren Daishonin can people with doubts feel the life of Buddha in the center of their lives despite having doubts. Even though you are sick or poor now, if you get into such an extreme situation again you will continue to worship. The real effect of faith is evident when you are sick or poor: you will feel good about being able to have a resolute mind without wandering or wavering or losing the mind of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Your environment and any evil you experience will not match the good of the Law.

QUESTION: Although we were in good faith, we were unaware of the proper practice and the correct teaching. Were our actions meaningless, or have we committed serious slander?

²² Taisekiji school – see Nichiren Shoshu

²³ Minobu – Nichiren Shu – a sect that chants Namumyōhōrengekyō, chapters of the Lotus Sutra, and worship Shakyamuni as the Buddha.

Are there consequences that could occur in our lives? Or is there the risk of staying chained to our previous mental conditioning?

RH: Because you were seriously practicing the wrong teaching before you started taking faith in Nichiren Daishonin's True religion, you were able to figure out that the previous teaching was wrong. When you tried to leave that wrong religion, the feeling of despair may have changed to relief and turned misfortune into fortune. However, because you quit the wrong religion and came to officially believe in the Law of Nichiren Daishonin doesn't make you correct and right. Belief is in your mind. You might have been brainwashed a lot by the wrong religious teaching. You have to start cleaning the wrong teachings out of your mind, one by one, and come to understand the true teaching, feel the joy of it, and receive the joy in your heart. You can't be forced to listen and follow the new teaching blindly. This can't be a new brainwashing. The Law of Nichiren Daishonin represents equality of all life and freedom in real life.

QUESTION: Why do we pray even when we can not, or find it hard to perceive Buddhahood within us? That I can not perceive it, could it be a problem of my belief, intention, behavior? Or is it lack of concentration, or my methodology, or training in prayer?

RH: I am the same as you.

There are moments when I don't want to do Gongyo and Odaimoku. Practicing (training) is very hard because it is to examine your mind and body. However, if I fight against my lazy mind and approach Gongyo with the idea that it is training, then when I finish, I feel refreshed, and feel happy that I have done it. As my awareness hasn't reached Buddhahood and full understanding of his teaching, I can't really explain 100% why I feel better, but I think it is because I touch the Buddhahood of Namumyōhōrengekyō and feel it.

It is the same as air. No matter what feeling you have while awake or when sleeping, you will still inhale and exhale. Unlike like Buddha, we people of doubt will understand when we look back after some time, that to continue something as simple as breathing is to live.

QUESTION: Why does the first Morning Prayer, which is dedicated to Shoten Zenjin, consist of only part of the Hoben-pon²⁴ and only the *Jigage*²⁵? It looks like what we learned in the Soka Gakkai. For many people this abbreviated prayer causes them to feel the same spirit and intentions of the Soka Gakkai. It is hard for us to concentrate on the enlightenment of all living things, which is the true intention. Would it be possible to avoid this short prayer and go directly to the *Seoge Gongyo*²⁶? Is there an alternative?

²⁴ Hoben-pon – 2nd chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which Shakyamuni declares that all Buddhas come into the world solely for the purpose of enabling all people to realize enlightenment, and that all living things have innate Buddha nature.

²⁴ 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..

²⁵ Jigage – the verse section of chapter 16 (Juryo-hon) of the Lotus Sutra that begins with *jiga toku burrai*.

²⁶ Seoge Gongyo – Gongyo that includes the verse and prose section of the 2nd chapter (Hoben-pon) of the Lotus Sutra that follows the junyoze (*nyoze so, nyoze sho*, etc.)

RH: We are supposed to do Gongyo toward Gohonzon in the Butsudan, but the reason we do Gongyo facing towards the east is because the sun rises in the east. In Buddhism, you will only do the 1st prayer of Gongyo in the morning but not in the evening, because meal time for Buddhist gods is in the morning. The meal for Buddhist gods is called ‘*Homi.*’ The best meal is also the best Law, Namumyōhōrengekyō. To offer *Homi* of Namumyōhōrengekyō by doing Gongyo toward the east before doing Gongyo is because during the preaching of Lotus Sutra, all the Gods gather with all the people and promise to protect the Lotus Sutra and practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. In the First Prayer (*shoza*), it says ‘Buddhist gods will protect the people who follow the Lotus Sutra no matter what’. We are not qualified to be protected if our life doesn’t follow the Lotus Sutra. That is why the morning prayer only consists of the abbreviated Hoben-pon to the *Junyoze*²⁷. We are sending a signal to the Buddhist Gods at the beginning of the morning Gongyo that we are going to start the preaching of Lotus Sutra (Gongyo is the recitation of the Sutra) and to request them not to forget to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. We hold our hands together as this is Gongyo, but we are not worshipping Shoten Zenjin as we worship Gohonzon.

When you do Gongyo toward Gohonzon in the Butsudan (Buddhist altar) by yourself, all the Buddhist gods will be around you. As this is the same as the preaching of the Lotus Sutra, you are doing Gongyo together.

Our style of Gongyo for the First Prayer (*shoza*) was not created by Soka Gakkai which only has an 80-year history. It was created by Nichiren-Daishonin who is the originator with over a 750 year history.

QUESTION: Could you please explain the meaning of the following passage from “Letter to Dōmyō. Zemmon” (*Gosho Zenshu* p. 1242 written 10th day of the 8th month 1276)? This Gosho, along with other Goshos, has been misinterpreted by me and perhaps many other members. “Concerning prayer, there are conspicuous prayer and conspicuous response, conspicuous prayer and inconspicuous response, inconspicuous prayer and inconspicuous response, and inconspicuous prayer and conspicuous response. However, the essential point is, so long as you carry out faith in this sutra, all your wishes will be fulfilled in both present and future existences.”

RH: When you pray to Gohonzon, there are four ways of praying and results are as follows.

1. Voice your prayers and write your prayers on a paper like an oath. Prayers will be answered immediately according to what you have asked for everyone’s eyes to see.

2. You voiced your prayers and wrote your prayers on a paper like an oath, but they were not answered immediately. When you look back, it took a long time for the prayer to get answered, but you didn’t notice when that happened.

3. When you prayed without telling anybody, the prayers were answered while nobody noticed.

²⁷ Junyoze – the section of the Hoben-pon (chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra) that states the 10 aspects of life beginning with *nyoze so, nyoze sho, nyoze tai.*

4. When you prayed without telling anybody, the prayers were answered in a way everybody noticed.

The first goal of prayer for worshipping the Lotus sutra has to be enlightenment. The important thing from these four prayers is that if you believe in Lotus Sutra, you have to follow the Law of the Lotus Sutra. If you pray and chant Odaimoku just for your success at gambling, or for holding a grudge based on your desire, you are absolutely not worth being protected by the Buddhist Gods.

QUESTION: Could you please explain the meaning of the goshō “Roots of Good Fortune”? (“Reply to Kubo-no-ama Gozen”, *Goshō Zenshu* p.1485, written the 27th day of the 12 month, 1281)

RH: Offering is a sacred thing you can’t do without in faith. But if the offering is the money earned by stealing and deceiving others, then it is not only an offering, it is a bad deed. When you make an offering to Gohonzon of money that you have earned from your diligent work and efforts, as part of your true belief, then that will be an offering. When priests use those offerings for the Lotus Sutra, then that will be a real offering. If you think any money is good, and it is better to give a huge amount of money, then it won’t be an offering, as it doesn’t have the heart of Namumyōhōrengekyō in the offering.

That is why Nichiren Shoshu priests will not receive any offerings from anyone other than believers. To offer to Nichiren means to offer to (or support) the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren is delivering the Law to believers as a practitioner of Lotus Sutra.

QUESTION: Does this Goshō mean that the origin or source of a sum of money and how we acquired it is important if we want to give it as an offering to the Lotus Sutra? Is this principle also valid for other types of offerings sent and received in other life situations? For example, offerings or payments from various types of work, from family, from friends, from lawsuits won in court, from inheritances received, from winnings or from sales of properties (houses)?

RH: Believers have to follow the rules within the faith. But it doesn’t apply for work, family, and friends, as there are many aspects and balances.

QUESTION: In my family’s house there is an assortment of statues of Buddha, the Virgin Mary, crucifixes, and more. When I visit or when I have to relocate to my family’s house, inwardly I am troubled because of the gravity and severity of what Nichiren taught about other teachings and beliefs in other religions. What is Nichiren’s view on this? As believers shouldn’t we abide by his view on this point? Should I stay even one night in a house with all these relics? Should I enshrine a Gohonzon in such a house?

RH: If the things belong to you, you have a right to dispose of them, but if they belong to your family and you dispose of them, then that will be a crime. Please be independent as soon as possible, get Gohonzon settled, and set up an environment that you don’t mix with other religions.

QUESTION: Should we explain this issue to non-believers or people who follow other religions? Should we make it clear to them that it is a mistake to pray before these relics and that it is wrong to guard them and exhibit these relics in their home?

RH: To exhibit things is a personal wish of other people. Even though you may dispose of them, the other person may buy another one, so it will never end. *Bōhō*, which means to keep things that are thought to go against Buddhism, is not about things. It is important for you to convert those people who hold beliefs and worship relics of other religions.

QUESTION: What does it mean to open the eyes of statues and painted images? The gosho "Opening the Eyes of Wooden or Painted Images" (*Gosho Zenshu* p. 468) is confusing to me.

RH: The word 'Kaigen' uses two Chinese characters, which mean 'open eyes'. Eyes mean Buddha-nature. Nichiren Daishonin respected Shakyamuni who preached the Lotus Sutra, but he considered Shakyamuni to be making a mistake before the Lotus Sutra. Society has been worshipping Shakyamuni in the same way throughout many time periods, and have made statues of Buddha as a an object of worship and worshipped it. Sculptors of Buddhist images are special craftsmen who carve statues as a job but not as their own belief. They will carve a statue as a thing, putting it between their legs and holding it with their feet. When the statue receives the Eye Opening ceremony (*Kaigen*), which means to give a heart to a Honzon so that it can be an object of worship, then it will become Buddha (Gohonzon) from a thing for the first time. Our Gohonzon is also made of a paper. An artisan will treat it as a thing and make it. We will offer it in front of Gohonzon, recite the Lotus Sutra and chant Odaimoku and perform *Kaigen*, then it will be granted the status of Gohonzon. Nichiren Daishonin taught us that we have to open the eyes (do *Kaigen*) of Shakyamuni with the Lotus Sutra when you worship Shakyamuni. "Opening the Eyes of Wooden or Painted Images" (*Moku enizo kaigen no koto*) is a gosho written by Nichiren-Daishonin when he was 43 years old, right after he was sent into exile to Izu. It is a Gosho written before he made Gohonzon widely known, so there is no dogmatic contradiction.

QUESTION: In Italy there is a procedure to resign from the archives of the "Catholic Church." It is incorrectly called "cancellation of baptism." Is this procedure necessary for me to be able to receive *Gojukai*? I still want to do this procedure to protect myself from my family, so that they can not decide on a type of funeral different from what I may want.

RH: Yes, it is better to do so. You really have to draw the line.

QUESTION: What is the "Heritage of the Law" (*kechimyaku*) about?

- a. What is involved in the "oral transmission" that is causing the Gohonzons of other sects to be invalid?

RH: The Law of Nichiren Daishonin is not a Law that is mainly instructed orally to special people. Nikko Shonin, who followed the Law of Nichiren Daishonin, said if you live as a

practitioner of the Lotus Sutra in the same way as Nichiren Daishonin, that would be following the Law, and you will be enlightened. He didn't say that he was not the one assigned to be responsible for the religion, but he wanted to spread the Law introduced by Nichiren Daishonin everywhere. Even though you have papers to prove your authenticity, if your way of life doesn't coincide with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, and if you don't live the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō, you won't be able to be enlightened.

b. What does "inherited" in regard to the Law and to faith entail?

RH: To pass on the spirit of faith to the next person. Then the next person will pass it to the next generation, and thus it will spread.

c. If a transmittal (from a High Priest) is not written down, are we relying on the memory of someone to remember exactly what was said to him years before? Or is it written down and placed in a secret place?

RH: There is no secret treasure maps in worship. As it is the Law of the enlightenment of all living beings (*Issai shujo jobutsu*), it will be delivered to everybody equally without secrecy or concealment. It is whether you can believe it or not.

QUESTION: About Gohonzon:

a. Since the Gohonzon is within me, why am I chanting to a man-made object?

RH: The Law is reason. It exists openly in the public domain equally to everybody. It is like air, gravity or the equation $1+1=2$. You can't really see it with your eyes, but it really exists, and it has to exist for our life to exist. When something isn't visible, humans will have a hard time understanding it. Teachers will write 'air', 'gravitation' or $1+1=2$ on the blackboard to explain these fundamentals to students. Even though you erase the words, 'air', 'gravitation' or $1+1=2$, air, gravitation and $1+1=2$ will still exist. Basically, Gohonzon is teaching and showing the Law (reason) to us (Humans) as a teacher (Buddha) even though we can't see it. That is Gohonzon. I want you to worship by imagining in your heart the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, by using Gohonzon (as a guide), the Law of *Issai shujo jobutsu* (*the enlightenment of all living things*), which is the real content of Gohonzon, and which certainly exists in the foundation of all the lives in the universe even though you can't see it. We have to seek and worship the Law which is located deep inside the visible Gohonzon, and is definitely there but is not able to be seen. Of course we should look upon the physical Gohonzon as a life and take good care of it. But the physical Honzon is not the Law; Gohonzon is an existence that Nichiren Daishonin realized and devised to try to compel us to understand the Law which exists in the life of all living things.

b. Why am I to look at the *Myo* character on the Gohonzon? How is doing that helping me to realize my Buddha nature?

RH: Namu means *Kii/Kimyō*, which means to worship and train with my life from the perspective of human beings. The most important thing in the Law of Lotus Sutra is its title *Myōhōrengekyō*. The very first letter is *MYO*. When there is no object of worship, when you chant *Odaimoku*, or even when you chant to Gohonzon, you feel distracted with many thoughts and can't focus, then please focus on one letter *Myo* and do Gongyo and chant *Odaimoku*.

c. If one can chant for a year while looking at a blank wall and am able to raise one's Buddha nature, what is the importance of having a Gohonzon?

RH: To keep your faith and to keep Gohonzon means to keep three things equally: *Shin* (action of *Namumyōhōrengekyō*), *Ko* (Gongyo and chanting *Odaimoku*) and *I* (will or spirit of *Namumyōhōrengekyō*). To betray these three elements is to betray the Law and Buddha. And beyond that you will be denying your own enlightenment, which is something that should never happen to you.

d. Although followers of the Daishonin didn't have a Gohonzon, their faith was so strong that they were willing to die rather than give up their faith. So why did the Daishonin feel it necessary to create a Gohonzon?

RH: Among all the religions, the Gohonzon of Nichiren Daishonin, representing the Law of the universe, is the only object of worship which is invisible but really exists, and shows, expresses, and explains the Law in characters (in written form). This means, many religions use a statue of Buddha which has features similar to a human being as their object of worship. Nichiren Daishonin created Gohonzon with lettering (characters) to express the Law that informed the Buddha. Also the Law itself is Buddha. There were many poor people and many illiterate people (as the educational opportunity was not equal to everybody) during the Kamakura era and there were not many believers who could have Gohonzon. Believers gathered at the local center where educated believers also gathered, did Gongyo together, and listened to the letters of Nichiren Daishonin and learned thoroughly and worshipped. That is why they didn't have Gohonzons at each individual house like we do in this modern era. Many people practiced *Naitoku shinko*, worshipping by imagining Gohonzon in their heart and doing Gongyo without having Gohonzon.

QUESTION: The Gohonzon has been described as a mirror reflecting one's own image. When I look at the Gohonzon, what I see are Chinese characters. What am I seeking to see? Am I to feel the vibrations of Buddhahood? Am I to become conscious of an inner wisdom?

a. Is this "self" that I am to "see" a feeling, or a consciousness of self?

RH: It is not your individual (personal) inner self, but it is for you to reflect and realize that there is Buddha-nature (the life of Buddha) basic to you and all life, and you are qualified to be enlightened.

b. What is this self that I am seeking?

RH: same answer as a.

QUESTION: What is enlightenment? How do I know I'm in a state of enlightenment? I know when I am in a state of anger and tranquility.

RH: Human beings believe humans are the greatest existence, but the world of Buddhahood is five realms above the world of Humanity. It is really impossible to imagine, realize and explain it.

If I explain in a way I understand, it means, to realize the Law of Nichiren Daishonin (*Kuon ganjo* (time without beginning), *Honninmyo* (True Cause), *Ichinen sanzen* (a single life moment possesses three thousand realms of existence), *Ninpo ikka* (fusion of the person and the Law), *Shitei ikka* (fusion of master, who has fused with the Law, and disciple) and to make an effort to live like that. I explain to believers that the way of living as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra is the state of Buddha.

QUESTION: I have heard that I am a Buddha, or that I have the Buddha nature within me, and that I am to chant to raise this Buddha nature. But how do I know when my Buddha nature has been raised? I ask this because I don't know "what" I am. How can I recognize my "image" if I don't know "What" I am, which means that I won't know when I am experiencing my true self. I want to consciously experience being my true self, even for a moment.

RH: *Myōin Myōhōrengekyō* means "mystic". The teachings prior to the Lotus Sutra taught that men had to follow 250 rules and women had to follow 500 rules to be enlightened as women are sinful. If you break the tiniest rule and can't realize enlightenment, then you can die, be reincarnated, change lives, and train to be enlightened as many times as possible until you erase your evil mind and doubts. As women are sinful, they can be only enlightened when they are reborn as a man and practice. Animals and plants, and any lives other than human beings can't possibly be enlightened. These are the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings.

However, only the Lotus Sutra explains that even though you are men of doubt, a woman, or a life form other than human, and if you don't get rid of all the conditions that impede you, but believe and connect to Lotus Sutra, then you can be enlightened. We call that *Myo* or *Myoho*, the Mystic Law. This is all about us believers. We are always skeptical and uncertain and tend to forget due to doubts that arise, and are constantly being tormented by the minds of Hell, Hunger, Animality and Anger.

I think the freshness that you only feel when you do Gongyo and chant ODaimoku, but not with other things, is the proof of touching the life of Buddha.

QUESTION: There are certain words that for me, have a Christian connotation, and when I hear them used in a Buddhist context I have that Christian perception of them which has been blocking my understanding of this practice. Please give me the meaning of the

following words from a Nichiren Buddhist perspective in a practical straightforward way. What do they entail?

a. Prayer.

RH: Faith is when the following three things are well balanced: *Shin* (physical action), *Ko* (oral chant (words)), and *I* (mind (thoughts)). Among all the actions, chanting is a basic thing anybody can do anywhere, and it is the most important way to receive the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō in your mind. (Of course, if you're sick and it affects your vocal cords or you lose your voice, chanting in your mind is the same as chanting out loud.)

b. Faith.

RH: To believe and respect the right Law and the teaching of Buddha who preached the correct Law.

c. Enlightenment.

RH: To Shakubuku (awaken) the desperate person who lost the truth (though the person doesn't believe he is lost and blind). To destroy the darkness and deliver the true Law.

d. Worship (the Gohonzon for example)

RH: The object of worship expressing the Law of Nichiren Daishonin is a different kind of faith from Christianity, Judaism and Islam which have a relationship between the God they believe in and the believers, which is a master and servant relationship requiring believers to obey and respect their God.

The object of worship of Nichiren Daishonin is the mirror that reflects our life which means, Buddha-nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō is at the foundation of all the lives in the universe including all lives in all the Ten Worlds. (Of course our lives are included in there too). Basically, Gohonzon expresses our life itself. It is not an existence of master and servant relationship confronting each other outside of your mind. You don't own your life. Your life exists in connection with all other lives, and all other lives exist by supporting each other. That is why we call Gohonzon a mirror to reflect our lives. It is the right object for respecting and connecting with the root of your own life.

e. Buddhahood (enlightenment).

RH: The Law of Nichiren Daishonin says, all lives are incomplete and full of doubts. Buddha is a person of doubt too. Buddhahood means to live by feeling every life has life of Buddha, by doing Gongyo, chanting Odaimoku, and learning the Law of Nichiren Daishonin.

e. Heart

RH: When you leave the heart to pursue your own interests, and are dominated by the desires in the six lower realms, Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity and Rapture that you are repeatedly reborn into, you will learn that you can't achieve real happiness if you are only pursuing your own happiness. Heart is the mind to fill your desire for

Buddhahood, where all the lives are connected and your life is included. Understand that heart is our real mind, and the Buddha-nature which we often don't notice.

QUESTION: Why do we offer water to Gohonzon?

RH: Water is the source of all life, and the origin of the sense of taste. First, before you start using it for daily use after you wake up, reserve the very first fresh water to offer to Gohonzon. After you've reserved the first fresh water, then you can wash your face and drink water. If you are working overnight, you can decide what determines morning and night for you based on your time schedule.

Before your evening Gongyo, please remove the water from the altar and wash the container, leave the container in a place where you will pour the very first fresh water the next morning. Therefore, we do not offer any water to Gohonzon for night time Gongyo.

You offer water everyday, and occasionally for special occasions, you will offer Osaké²⁸(saké). A long time ago, people grew their own rice and harvested the best rice and spent a long time and effort to make Saké. They offered this Saké to Gohonzon as the evidence and symbol of their constant, true heart. Saké can only be created and offered with a constant, true heart. Today, in this modern world, you can easily get Saké at the store, but you should never forget the original meaning of the offering of Osaké, which is the combination of water—a symbol of the source of natural life—and Saké which is created with the combination of nature and the true human heart.

QUESTION: Italy just instituted a new law about three weeks ago. It requires a new tax to be collected from all citizens for the allocation of funds to various recognized religious groups. The Soka Gakkai is listed among the religious groups. Would it be slander to the Law of True Buddhism to pay this new tax?

RH: To be a people of one particular nation means to live with the fate of that nation, whether you like it or not. Even though a politician leads people of the nation in a direction different from your thoughts and opinions, you are going to have the same fate as the nation.

In any nation, you can't refuse to pay the military expense portion of a tax because you object to a war and are against the military. In the same manner, you cannot refuse to pay taxes which will support Soka-Gakkai.

You should pay what you are supposed to pay. And within your individual capacity, you should protest with speech and express your objections. And you should make an effort to make as many people as possible understand the mistake and contradiction of the policy.

If you keep silent, then it is the same as you agreeing with the policy, and you are equally as guilty. Even though we have little influence, if we don't take action with words, we will be powerless and helpless, and also be counted as a supporter. This can't happen to a believer whose mission is shakubuku.

²⁸ Osaké – honorable saké. – rice wine

OESHIKI CEREMONY

Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, NJ

June 2004

The Oeshiki²⁹ ceremony is conducted on October 13. We make paper cherry blossoms and use them to decorate the altar for the ceremony. Afterwards, we keep the cherry blossoms next to the altar for a short time. Believers in Sanbo-in usually keep them from October 13 until the end of the year. In Nichiren Shoshu we do not decorate the altar with colorful flowers. Although we use these flowers as a part of the ceremony for Nichiren Daishonin's death, they are not supposed to be used as decoration throughout the year. We keep them for a short while, and then destroy them. You can burn them or chop them up and throw them away.

In Japan we use kumquats, tangerines or persimmons, the fruits of the season which were eaten during the Daishonin's time to decorate the vases.

In addition to reading Nichiren Daishonin's Rissho Ankoku-ron³⁰ we read letters of admonition to the government written by successive high priests for the government to consider Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. There are seven letters, including the Rissho Ankoku-ron which are read in the order that follows: 1) 9th High Priest, Nichiu Shonin's letter, 2) Rissho Ankoku-ron, 3) Nichiren Daishonin's letter of remonstrance, 4) Second High Priest Nikko Shonin's letter, 5) Third High Priest Nichimoku Shonin's letter, 6) Fourth High Priest, Nichido Shonin's letter and, 7) Fifth High Priest Nichigyo Shonin's letter. These letters are actions taken by these priests for the government to consider Daishonin's Buddhism for the sake of *kosen rufu*³¹.

Among the priests who wrote the admonitions, Nichiu Shonin (1409-1482) was the most recent, so his letter is read first. The priest attending the ceremony with the most seniority reads this letter. While ninth high priest Nichiu Shonin would be the youngest among the priests whose letters are read, his letter is read first by the most senior priest because the current generation is supposed to take the lead in the *kosen rufu* movement.

Of course the letters were all written at different times. Nichiu Shonin was the 9th high priest and never met Nichiren Daishonin. Nonetheless, this is the ceremony we conduct today, which was initiated by Nikko Shonin (1246-1333) on the 3rd anniversary of Nichiren Daishonin's death. As each of the early high priests died, their letters of admonition were added to the ceremony.

²⁹ Oeshiki - The Oeshiki ceremony is the most important Buddhist service celebrating Nichiren Daishonin's eternal life as well as the eternal Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

³⁰ Rissho 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.

³¹ Kosen-rufu - to widely declare and spread True Buddhism.

The Minobu sect considers Oeshiki a memorial service, but Nichiren Shoshu does not. In Nichiren Shoshu Oeshiki is a celebration of eternal life as well as the eternal life of the Buddha. For us this is not a somber occasion. It is an occasion to rejoice in the life of Nichiren Daishonin, which we believe exists eternally. On this day we congratulate each other for the life of Nichiren Daishonin.

Even though there isn't a temple in the U.S., I would like you to exchange words of good wishes when you meet each other at Oeshiki in October. Take this day as a holiday and truly celebrate Nichiren Daishonin's life. It is the most important day of the year.

There are many ways you can celebrate. Perhaps you can make special offerings to Gohonzon. You can also make a special dinner and give gifts if you like. I give gifts. This is how I have taught my children the importance of the day. I would really like you to take this day more seriously than any other day. From a spiritual point of view it is the holiest day of the year, and yet you should still celebrate Oeshiki in ways even more joyous than Christmas is celebrated.



GOSHO SELECTION

Letter to Ko-no-ama Gozen ³²

I have received three hundred mon of coins from the wife of Abutsu-bo.³³ Since both of you are of the same mind, have someone read this letter to you and listen to it together.

I have also received the unlined summer robe you sent to me here in the recesses of this mountain in Hakiri Village, Kai Province, all the way from the province of Sado where you live. The Hosshi chapter in the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: "If there is one who, in his quest for the Buddha Way, shall throughout one kalpa join his palms and in my presence praise me with countless verses, because of this praise of the Buddha he will gain immeasurable benefit. But one who praises the bearers of this sutra will have blessings surpassing even that." This means that the benefit of making offerings to a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law surpasses that of serving in all sincerity as noble a Buddha as Shakyamuni with one's body, mouth and mind for an entire

³² *Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 4, p. 139.

³³ Wife of Abutsu-bo - Sennichi-ama. While Nichiren Daishonin was in exile on Sado, she and her husband Abutsu-bo converted to his teaching. The couple frequently visited him in his forlorn hut at Tsukahara, bringing him food, writing paper and other daily necessities. After the Daishonin was pardoned, Sennichi-ama maintained devout faith and sent her husband to visit him at Mt. Minobu three times.

medium kalpa. Although this may seem unbelievable, you should not doubt it, because such are the Buddha's golden words.

The Great Teacher Miao-lo further clarifies this passage from the sutra by saying, "If there is one who troubles [a preacher of the Dharma], then his head will be split into seven pieces; if there is one who makes offerings [to the preacher], his good fortune will surpass that of the ten honorable titles." In other words, the benefit of making offerings to a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law exceeds that of making offerings to a Buddha endowed with the ten honorable titles³⁴. On the other hand, one who persecutes a votary of the Lotus Sutra in the impure age will have his head broken into seven pieces.

I, Nichiren, am the most extraordinary person in Japan. The reason I say so is this. The seven reigns of heavenly gods I will set aside, and the five reigns of earthly gods³⁵ are beyond my knowledge, but throughout the ninety reigns from the time of the first human emperor Jimmu until the present, or during the more than seven hundred years since the reign of Emperor Kimmei [when Buddhism was introduced to this country], no one has ever been so universally hated as Nichiren on account of either secular or Buddhist matters. Mononobe no Moriya³⁶ burnt down temples and pagodas, and Kiyomori Nyudo³⁷ had Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji temples destroyed, but the people of their clans did not harbor hatred toward them. Masakado³⁸ and Sadato³⁹ rebelled against the imperial court, and the Great Teacher Dengyo⁴⁰ incurred antagonism from the priests of the seven major temples of Nara⁴¹, but these men were not hated by priests, nuns, laymen and laywomen throughout the whole of Japan. In my case, however, parents, brothers, teachers and fellow priests - every single person from the ruler on down to the common people - treat me as if I were their parents' enemy, and show me more hostility than if I were a rebel or a robber.

Thus, at times I have been vilified by several hundred people; and at other times, besieged by several thousands, I have been attacked with swords and staves. I have been

³⁴ Ten honorable titles: Ten epithets for a Buddha, expressing his power, wisdom, virtue and compassion. For example, "Thus Come One" (*Jap nyorai*) means that a Buddha manifests the fundamental truth of all phenomena and grasps the law of causality permeating past, present and future.

³⁵ Seven reigns of heavenly gods and the five reigns of earthly gods: A reference to native deities said to have ruled Japan before the time of the first emperor Jimmu.

³⁶ Mononobe no Moriya (d. 587): An official of the Yamato court period (300-710) who opposed the adoption of Buddhism. When an epidemic broke out, he declared to Emperor Bidatsu that it was because of the new religion, and attempted to halt all Buddhist practice. He was killed by Soga no Umako.

³⁷ Kiyomori Nyudo (1118-1181): Taira no Kiyomori, leader of the Taira clan. After winning two brief campaigns, he seized military power; then, by marrying his daughter to the emperor, he was able to consolidate his authority and eventually dominate the court. In 1177 he uncovered a plot against the Taira clan in Nara and had Taira no Shigehira raze Todai-ji and Kofuku-ji temples in punishment for their support of the conspirators.

³⁸ Masakado (d. 940): Taira no Masakado, a warrior who wielded power in eastern Japan. In 939 he rebelled against the imperial court by proclaiming himself the new emperor. However, he was killed and his rebellion crushed by the joint forces of his cousin, Taira no Sadamori, and Fujiwara no Hidesato.

³⁹ Sadato (1019-1062): Abe no Sadato, the head of a powerful family in eastern Japan. Continuing a rebellion begun by his father, Abe no Yoritoki, he sought independence from imperial rule but was defeated and killed in a battle with the imperial forces.

⁴⁰ Great Teacher Dengyo - (767-822) founder of the Tendai sect of Buddhism in Japan.

⁴¹ Seven major temples of Nara: The principal temples of Buddhism in Nara, the capital of Japan during the Nara period (710-794). They are Todai-ji, Kofuku-ji, Gango-ji, Daian-ji, Yakushi-ji, Saidai-ji and Horyu-ji.

driven from my residence and banished from my province. Finally I twice incurred the regent's displeasure, being exiled once to Izu Province and again to Sado Island. When I was banished to Sado in the northern sea, I had neither provisions to sustain me nor even clothes as coarse as those made of wisteria vines to cover my body. The people there, both priests and laity, hated me even more than did the men and women of Sagami Province⁴². Abandoned in the wilderness and exposed to the snow, I sustained my life by eating grass.

I felt as though I were personally experiencing the sufferings of Su Wu⁴³, who survived by eating snow while living in captivity in the land of the northern barbarians for nineteen years, or of Li Ling⁴⁴, who was imprisoned in a rocky cave on the shore of the northern sea for six years. I underwent this ordeal not because of any fault of my own but solely because of my desire to save all the people of Japan.

However, while I was in exile there, you and your husband Ko Nyudo, avoiding the eyes of others, brought me food by night. You were ready to give your lives for my sake without fearing punishment from the provincial officials. Therefore, although life in Sado was harsh, I was loath to leave, feeling as if my heart were being left behind, and I seemed to be pulled back with each step I took.

I wonder what karmic bonds we formed in the past. Just when I was thinking how mysterious it was, you sent your most precious husband as your messenger to this distant place. I thought it must be a dream or an illusion. Even though I cannot see you, I am convinced that your heart remains here with me. Whenever you yearn for me, Nichiren, look toward the sun which rises in the morning and the moon which appears in the evening. I will invariably be reflected in the sun and the moon. In the next life, let us meet in the pure land of Eagle Peak.

Namumyōhōrengekyō.
Nichiren

The sixteenth day of the sixth month, Jun 16, 1275

Ko-no-ama

⁴² Sagami Province: The province where Kamakura, the seat of the military government, was located.

⁴³ Su Wu (140-60 B.C.): A minister of Emperor Wu of the Former Han dynasty. In 100 B.C., Emperor Wu sent Su Wu to the land of the northern barbarians (nomadic Hsiung-nu tribes) to demand that they acknowledge fealty to him. The shanyu, their chieftain, rejected the demand and had Su Wu seized. Imprisoned in a cave, he was for a time forced to survive by eating snow, and endured many hardships before the efforts of his retainer enabled him to return to the Han nineteen years later.

⁴⁴ Li Ling (d. 74 B.C.): A military commander during the Former Han dynasty. During a battle, he was captured by the northern barbarians and imprisoned. When news of his defeat reached the court, Emperor Wu mistakenly believed that he had revolted against the Han dynasty, and had all the members of his family killed. Later, the emperor repented and offered to secure his return. But Li Ling refused and died in the land of the northern barbarians.

How to Make Simple Cherry Blossoms

Reprinted from "DIY Cherry Blossoms" by Kara
At 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 !



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