

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

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## WHO WROTE THE LOTUS SUTRA?

Reverend Raidō Hirota  
International Meeting  
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During his lifetime, Shakyamuni<sup>1</sup> gave long and short sermons or lectures totaling approximately 84,000 teachings. Language at that time – approximately 3,000 [Grab your reader's attention with a great quote from the document or use this space to emphasize a key point. To place this text box anywhere on the page, just drag it.]

years ago – was limited to words that related to daily life. The vocabulary was not mature enough to express deep thought and feelings. Nor were there words for cognitive expression. So, at that time words could not express exact meaning.

After Shakyamuni's advent words began to increase and vocabulary developed. But it took many years to get there. For nearly a thousand years people memorized the sutras or teachings Shakyamuni had delivered, and passed them down orally to each successive generation.

During the thousand years following Shakyamuni's death there were 24 successors<sup>2</sup> who took



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### *The Middle Way*

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<sup>1</sup> Shakyamuni - Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE-949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism on this earth.

<sup>2</sup> 24 successors of Shakyamuni – those who propagated the Shakyamuni's Buddhism during the first 1000 years following Shakyamuni's death. They were: 1) Mahakashyapa, 2) Ananda, 3) Madhyantika, 4) Shanavasa (Shanakavasa), 5) Upagupta,

on the role of what you could call “editor-in-chief” of the teachings. These 24 were responsible for preserving and passing down the words and content of the sutras to the next person. If you divide 1000 years by 24, the average age of the 24 successors was about 41 years. Of course, each individual had a different lifespan. Some lived longer, while others had shorter lives. Each of the successors passed the teachings on to the next successor who had been a disciple of his, or a disciple of one of the previous successors. For example, shortly after Shakyamuni’s death Mahakashyapa became the first successor. Mahakashyapa transferred the teachings to the second successor, Ananda. Both Mahakashyapa and Ananda had been disciples of Shakyamuni. The third and fourth successors, Madhyantika and Shanavasa were both disciples of, and inherited the teachings from Ananda. And so on and so forth. This is how the teachings were preserved and passed down from one generation to the next.

The beginning of the Lotus Sutra liturgy that we recite begins with:

爾時世尊從三昧。安詳而  
Ni ji se son. Ju san mai. An jō ni

起。告舍利弗。  
ki. Gō Shar i hotsu.

Translated this reads:

Thereupon the World-Honored One  
quietly emerged from contemplation  
and addressed Shariputra.

The sutra does not begin with Shakyamuni saying, “listen to me.” Rather, the content of the sutra is written and recorded from the perspective of the listeners who were hearing the Buddha’s teaching. That is why the text states, “Shakyamuni said it this way,” and “thus we heard” (this is how we heard it). It’s not the opinion of one person. Each person stated what they heard: one heard it one way; another heard it another way; another heard it still another way; and so and so forth. After each person expressed what they had heard, they took into consideration the smallest detail of what someone said. They discussed it, and decided on the story Shakyamuni was conveying and came to a consensus on a term. This is how they collaborated and edited. And this is how the sutra was crafted.

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6) Dhritka, 7)Mikkaka, 8) Buddhananda, 9) Budhamitra, 10) parshva, 11) Punyayashas, 12)Ashvaghosha, 13) Kapimala, 14) Nagarjuna, 15) Aryadeva, 16) Rahulata, 17) Samghanandi, 18) Samghayashas, 19) Kumarata, 20) Jayata, 21) Vasubandhu, 22) Manorhita, 23) Haklena and 24) Aryasimha.

It was not the age of any kind of recording device. They could not record exactly what Shakyamuni stated. How they recorded was with each person expressing what they heard. The entire body of teachings or sutras were composed in this way: "Thus we heard."

Because the sutra was composed in this way, some people say it was not written by Shakyamuni. But if you view it from another perspective, many people heard what Shakyamuni said and kept editing what they heard, and checked and edited it again and again, and again, perfecting it until it became the content of the sutra we have today. I think this sutra now is better because of the attention to detail and the meticulous effort made in transcribing and delivering Shakyamuni's lectures until now.

The question is, who wrote the Lotus Sutra<sup>3</sup>? During the first one thousand years the Buddha's teachings were confined to India. After a thousand years, the Indian language had matured and developed and was finally able to express deep, perceptive, cognitive thought. Words were now able to be expressed in written form with the development of an alphabet. As a result, writings could spread to different countries. Consequently, after a thousand years the sutras left India and spread to China, Southeast Asia, Korea, and Japan, and eventually all over.

**Question:** How can you trust an oral transmission when changes in language occur over time as a language develops?

**Rev. Hirota (RH):** In Tibet, there is Tibetan Buddhism. Tibet, today, is still a developing country in every way, including culturally. Of course, they do have written text. But when they teach Buddhism, they still teach orally. One by one, priest to priest, priest to lay person, the teachings are delivered orally. They are following the method of how the teachings were transmitted just after Shakyamuni passed away.

For us, based on our current way of life, it is hard for us to believe that a couple of thousand pages of teachings can be passed down orally. But the ability and sensibility of human beings during the time before there was literacy, before alphabets were developed, was heightened to a degree that we in this age, who depend on the written word, cannot imagine. People who lived during ancient times had an extraordinary ability. For example, nowadays almost everyone uses mobile phones. But before mobile phones, many people could memorize 20 or more telephone numbers. But now no one memorizes phone numbers because our cell phones do it for us. And we rely on that. Because we are not motivated to memorize things, and no longer need to memorize things, we lose the ability to memorize. We are probably underestimating the ability of the people living during non-literate times. We really don't know how much they could do.

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<sup>3</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.

After the development of an alphabet in India, the Lotus Sutra was able to be recorded in writing. India is a very large country with many different dialects. (It's the same in Japan where each area has its own particular accent and dialect.) The Lotus Sutra began to spread among devout monks in every region of India. There were six monks who translated the Lotus Sutra into Chinese from different Indian dialects, creating six different versions. There is a term which describes these six translations, all of which indicate that each of the monks placed the Lotus Sutra in the center of belief. The term is *rokukyosandon*, which means, six Lotus Sutras, each having their own power to spread. Though six complete versions were translated into Chinese, only three versions exist today. They are *Cheng-fa-hua-ching*), translated by Dharmaraksha in 286CE; *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching* (Japanese pronunciation *MyōhōRengeKyō*), translated by Kumarajiva in 406CE; and *T'ien-pen-miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*, translated by Jnanagupta and Dharmagupta in 601CE. The latter is a revision of Kumarajiva's version.

Kumarajiva was a Buddhist monk, originally from India, who had a great desire to deliver Buddhism to other countries. Since he was an extremely knowledgeable priest as well as being gifted in languages, he studied and became fluent in Chinese in order to deliver Buddhism to China. He not only translated the Lotus Sutra, he was able to express the deeper essence of its content in a beautiful, easy to read language. Among the three extant translations, Kumarajiva's translation is the most accessible and comfortable for entering your heart. The Lotus Sutra that spread all over the world is mostly Kumarajiva's version. The Chinese characters of the two chapters of the Lotus Sutra which we recite were written by Kumarajiva.

The Sanskrit title of the Lotus Sutra is *Saddharma-pundarika Sutra*, which is what Shakyamuni taught. It is the same as *Myoho-Renge-Kyo* which is the Japanese pronunciation of 妙法蓮華經, the Chinese characters of the title *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*. When you compare *Myoho-Renge-Kyo* and *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching* The *romaji*<sup>4</sup> don't look alike, and they don't sound alike. Kumarajiva did not translate direct word for word. Rather he married the meaning of the words with mellifluous sounds, easy to read in Chinese. *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching* (妙法蓮華經) when read in Japanese becomes *Myoho-Renge-Kyo*. If you chant *Saddharma-pundarika Sutra* it does not flow. But the Chinese characters used by Kumarajiva in his translation of the title of the Lotus Sutra flows beautifully when pronounced *Myoho-Renge-Kyo*. If someone, who does not know the connection, listened to these two phrases -- *Saddharma-pundarika Sutra* and *Myoho-Renge-Kyo* – they would probably not suspect the two phrases have the same meaning. Kumarajiva endeavored to include in the Chinese translation of this phrase the mind of Shakyamuni and all that Shakyamuni wanted to convey in his teachings.

When Buddhism was introduced to Japan, the Chinese culture had been accepted, and the Chinese writing system was in use with Japanese pronunciation. That is, the Chinese characters of the Lotus Sutra were read in Japanese, not translated into Japanese. And that is

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<sup>4</sup> Romaji – method of writing kanji characters in Roman letters.

exactly what we do today: we recite the Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra with Japanese pronunciation.

**QUESTION:** Were all of the 84,000 teachings of Shakyamuni transcribed and put into writing?

**RH:** The writings were compiled into encyclopedic volumes entitled *Daizōkyō*<sup>5</sup>. It is believed that the *Daizōkyō* contains all of Shakyamuni's sutras.. To be honest, I didn't count the sutras, and I haven't read the entire *Daizōkyō*. Therefore, I don't know if there are 84,000 teachings. But I can say there are a great many. The number 84,000 is used to indicate "a huge number." In any case, all of Shakyamuni's lectures have been included in this encyclopedia.

**QUESTION:** Are they all translated into Japanese?

**RH:** The *Daizōkyō* is written in *kanji* (Chinese characters). Japanese people understand Chinese characters. If the content is written in *kanji*, but not translated into Japanese, we know how to read it. And, if you are educated you can understand the meaning or the content of the Chinese text. However, the Chinese phrasing is not arranged as it is arranged in Japanese. There is a rule: if you rearrange the *kanji* characters, an educated Japanese person will understand the meaning of Chinese writing. So even though the *Daizōkyō* is not translated, we understand what is written.

**QUESTION:** Did Kumarajiva translate the *Daizōkyō*?

**RH:** Kumarajiva did not translate the entire *Daizōkyō* because there are (plus or minus) 84,000 lectures contained in these volumes. It would have been physically impossible because there was not enough time in his lifetime to translate all of it. Kumarajiva chose what he considered the most important of Shakyamuni's sutras to translate and deliver to China in the Chinese language. The first sutra he chose was the Lotus Sutra as it was considered by him the most important of Shakyamuni's teachings. The Lotus Sutra was the first sutra Kumarajiva delivered to China.

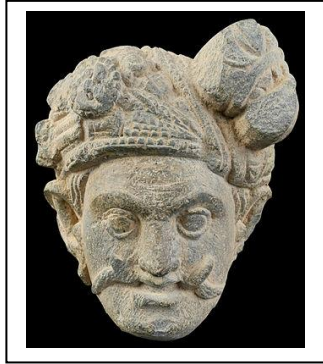
A story titled *Saiyuki*, which originated in China, became very popular in Japan, where it was made into a TV show and a 1960 anime musical film. It is about a journey to the West. The movie was released in English in 1961 as *Alakazam the Great* starring Frankie Avalon. It is about a priest named Sanso Hoshi and his servant who is a monkey named Saru San (Mr. Monkey). The priest, his monkey and others journey to India to search for the Lotus Sutra and bring it back to China. Sanso Hoshi – the priest – is modeled after Kumarajiva.

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<sup>5</sup> *Daizōkyō – The Complete Collection of Buddhist Sutras, Laws, and Treatises*

# THE DEVIL OF THE SIXTH HEAVEN

Reverend Raidō Hirota  
Quakertown, Pennsylvania  
July 28, 2019



**QUESTION:** In the gosho, "Letter to the Brothers," Nichiren Daishonin wrote "The devil of fundamental darkness can even enter the life of a bodhisattva<sup>6</sup> who has reached the highest stage of practice and prevent him from attaining the Lotus Sutra's ultimate blessing – Buddhahood itself. Thus, he can easily obstruct those in any lower stage of practice. The Devil of the Sixth Heaven<sup>7</sup> enters the lives of a man's wife and children and deludes him. He also possesses the sovereign in order to threaten the votary of the Lotus Sutra, or causes parents to hinder the faith of devoted children."

1. What is the meaning of this passage?
2. Does this passage have a different meaning today than it had during Nichiren Daishonin's day?

**Reverend Raidō Hirota (RH):** The concept of "Devil" has different connotations in different cultures. What is your understanding of devil? Is it absolute evil? For instance, the Western connotation of Satan, the Devil, Prince of Evil would be translated as *Maō* in Japanese. The Japanese word *Kami* is also interpreted differently in different cultures. In the West it would be defined as God, the Almighty, Supreme Being, the Lord, the Creator, Allah. In Japanese it would be defined as a god or goddess, a deity, a divine being. What image or concept do you have of "Devil"?

**Believer 1 (B1):** Evil divinity.

**B2:** Pure evil. This evil is so powerful that it can get into the Buddha, so it can also get into your children and change them.

**B3:** The Devil is anti-God. Gods protect; Devils destroy.

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<sup>6</sup> Bodhisattva – one who aspires to Buddhahood. The 9<sup>th</sup> of the 10 Ten Worlds.

<sup>7</sup> Devil of the Sixth Heaven – the king of devils who lives in the highest of the six heavens of the world of desire.

**RH:** The Buddhist concept of “Devil” is totally different.

As I have mentioned before, all things have Buddha-nature or Buddha-life. That also includes the Devil. *Maō* is what the Devil is called in Japanese and in Buddhism. And the Devil King is called *Dairokuten no Maō*, “The Devil of the Sixth Heaven.” *Maō* or the Devil is part of Buddha-life. Rocks, air, water, plants – everything has the Ten Worlds of life. Therefore, not only does the Devil belong to the World of Hell, the Devil has the World of Buddha as well as the life of all the 10 Worlds.

A story that Nichiren Daishonin often relayed is the story about Sessen Doji.

For years Sessen Doji wandered here, there and everywhere in search of the True Law. He visited cities, the countryside and the wilderness. He slept on the street or in the mountains. He didn’t bathe, and he hardly ate. He lived this way in the pursuit of the True Law. People suggested if he went here or there, he would find the True Law. But when he arrived at the suggested destinations he did find it. No where could he find it. So he secluded himself in the mountains and devoted himself to meditation. Sadly, he still did not realize it.

One day, as he reached the peak of a mountain and started his descent down the other side, *Maō*, the fierce looking Devil of the Sixth Heaven, appeared in his path. *Maō* was quietly reciting a passage from the Lotus Sutra. Sessen Doji was at once surprised to hear words of truth after searching for so long, frighten by the appearance of *Maō*, and confused that these words of truth were coming from the mouth of the demon: “All is changeable, nothing is permanent. This is the Law of birth and death for all life, equally.” In all his years of searching, no human being had make this truth so clear to Sessen Doji. That is why it was so shocking to see a demon reciting it.

The phrases that *Maō* had uttered were only part of the sutra passage – or half of the Truth. Sessen Doji realized there must be more. He wanted to know the whole truth so that he could have a better understanding of life. “Do you know the rest of this passage?” he asked *Maō*.

“Yes, of course I know it,” replied *Maō*.

“Could you please recite the remainder of the passage to me?” asked Sessen Doji.

“No, I can’t,” said the Devil. “I’m very hungry and too weak to say another word.

Sessen Doji had traveled the world for many, many years in search of the truth. Now that he has heard one half of it, he was closer than he had ever been to hearing the whole truth. So he asked *Maō*, “If you are so hungry, I will go to the nearest village and get food for you. Then, once you have eaten and regained your strength, will you recite the whole passage to me?”

“No,” said the Devil. “I don’t eat the food that humans eat. I only eat the meat and blood of a living human being.”

Sessen Doji knew that there were no other human being in this remote forest of the mountains. He was the only one. But if he offered his life to nourish the demon, he would not

be alive to hear the whole sutra passage. Over and over and over again he visualized in his mind, all the miles he had traveled, and all the hardships he has suffered over so many years in search of the Truth. He knew his reason for living and the purpose of his life was to search for and find the True Law. With this awareness he proposed to the Devil: “I will offer my living body in exchange for hearing the True Law. But you must first recite the entire passage, then you can eat me.”

The demon was skeptical of Sessen Doji’s trustworthiness.

To allay the demon’s skepticism, Sessen Doji called upon the Buddha and the heavenly gods to vouch for his honesty.

Only then did *Maō* recite the remainder of the sutra passage: “Life is short, but it is eternal. If you are born, you must learn about the eternal Law. That is *Nirvana* – the zenith of the truth of the eternal Law.”

Upon hearing this Sessen Doji was filled with immense joy. But it bothered him that he was the only person who heard this Truth. He didn’t want to keep this revelation to himself. He wanted to share it with others. He wanted to let others become aware of the truth and feel the joy that he was feeling. This is something he had to do before he gave his life to the Devil. So he ran from tree to tree, to boulders and sides of mountain cliffs, on anything he could find, writing the entire passage on everything everywhere –so that passersby could see the True Law: the truth about life. And he prayed that those who saw it would understand it.

When Sessen Doji had finished, he climbed to the top of a boulder and said to the Devil, “I’m ready. I will now jump into your mouth.”

*Dairokuten no Maō*, the Devil of the Sixth Heaven, opened his mouth wide. Sessen Doji leapt towards the monstrously grotesque, gaping hole of the Devil’s mouth. But, instead of biting and chewing Sessen Doji, the Devil caught him in his arms and carefully placed him on the ground. Bowing humbly, *Maō*, now full of remorse, spoke. “I tested you to see if you were a sincere seeker of the Law. Now that I see you were willing to give up your life for the True Law, and wanted to share the Law with others, I will, from now on, be a *Shoten Zenjin* (Buddhist god) who will protect the True Law. And I promise to protect you as you try to spread the True Law in this world.”

The important thing for you to understand is that the Devil of the Sixth Heaven also has Buddha-nature. When you experience *sansho shima*<sup>8</sup> – obstacles and hardship – the Devil is trying to challenge you to determine if you are striving to follow the True Law. Therefore, devils or demons are not an entirely evil entity. They also have Buddha-life and Buddha-mind too.

In Buddhism, all life has exactly the same life as we have. Every life is equal. No one, or nothing is 100% good, or 100% bad. Everything has both sides – good and bad. The story of Sessen Doji illustrates that all lives are equal and everybody has the same life.

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<sup>8</sup> Sansho shima – four obstacles and three devils. Obstacles and difficulties that challenge one’s faith.



What Nichiren Daishonin is teaching us here is that even if a person is evil or a devil, if that person is teaching the True Law, listen to the True Law. The person who is esteemed in society could be opposed to, or not following the True Law, while a person who is lowly or even wretched could be teaching the True Law. You cannot judge by someone's appearance, or their way of life. Thus, a devil could be evil, while also being a teacher of the True Law. This is something you need to understand, and adjust your understanding of the nature of the devil to correspond with the concept of "devil" as it is understood in Buddhism.

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## **BUDDHIST HELL**

**Reverend Raidō Hirota**  
**International Meeting**  
**May 3-4 2023**

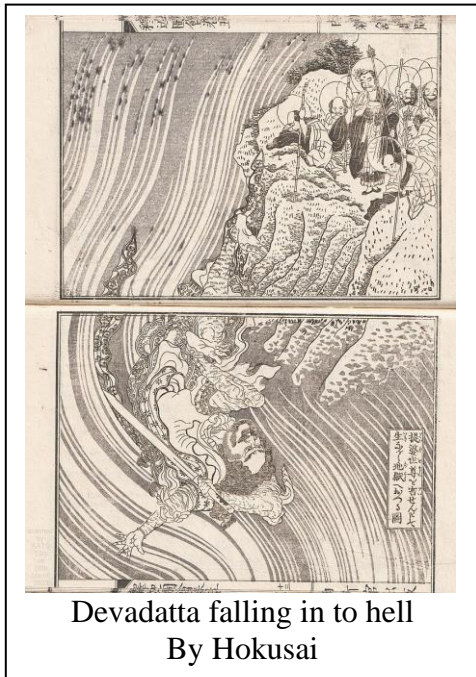
**QUESTION: What does Buddhist Hell look like in practical terms? What would someone experience in Buddhist Hell? What would be the nature of the suffering that one experiences in Buddhist Hell?**

**RH:** In Christianity the belief is, when you do something bad you will fall into Hell and suffer forever.

In Buddhism, when a person has chosen not to believe in the True Law, and is not making the right causes in their life, and has committed something really bad, they will go to Hell after they die, where they can reflect on their life and come to realize what they had not realized while alive: that they had not made the right causes in their life, and had done something bad. It is a time when you are suffering. During this time you realize how you lived your life was wrong, the True Teaching you chose not to accept was right, and the actions you had taken were wrong. It is a time for reflection—to review the way you lived your life, and the mistakes you made. It is a time when one can recover from the mistakes made. This is Buddhist Hell.

Chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra relates the story of Devadatta. Devadatta was the cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha. Initially, he was a very astute, serious and diligent disciple of the Buddha. Based on his appearance and demeanor – though we don't know since there were no cameras during his time – it is said everyone mistook him for the Buddha. Devadatta himself began to think that perhaps he, and not Shakyamuni, should be the teacher and leader of the

*sangha*<sup>9</sup>. He came to believe, more and more, that if he were the head of the Buddhist teachings, the teachings would develop quickly and spread more widely. He then began devising plans to assassinate Shakyamuni with the hope of assuming the role at the helm of Buddhism as Buddha.



Devadatta's many attempts to take the life the Buddha all failed. Upon his final attempt, he reached out to scratch the feet of the Buddha with long fingernails steeped in snake venom. Just at that moment the earth suddenly quaked, and split open under Devadatta's feet. He tumbled, head over heels, into the fissure as if he was falling into Hell. What a shock it was to him that he had fallen into while still alive. But he was a very evil man who, for many years tried to take the life of Shakyamuni. And yet, Shakyamuni paid a visit to Devadatta in Hell. The Buddha told Devadatta that in a past life Devadatta had believed and practiced the Lotus Sutra. Because of that virtue, Shakyamuni said Devadatta would become a Buddha in the future. Before departing, Shakyamuni reminded Devadatta of the importance of having faith in the Lotus Sutra while he is in Hell.

Upon Shakyamuni's return to Eagle Peak where he had been teaching the Lotus Sutra, his disciples were appalled when they learned he had visited the evil Devadatta in Hell, and had told him he would become a Buddha in the future. The disciples couldn't understand it, and couldn't believe it. They thought Shakyamuni had lost his mind. He told them it may seem like a contradiction. But every person has a good mind and an evil mind. Each life as a whole, embodies everything. This is the life of Buddha. This is also the Law of *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*.

Devadatta represents all evil people. Prior to the preaching of Chapter 12 (Devadatta Chapter) of the Lotus Sutra it was said that evil people could not become Buddha. And evil people could not be saved. But with the teaching of the Devadatta Chapter onward, no matter who you are, whether evil, or mentally challenged, everyone can become Buddha. A good person has an evil mind, and an evil person has good within them. Everything is included within a life. If it were not taught that an evil person could become Buddha, then no one in this world can be saved and become Buddha. This teaching had never existed before the Devadatta chapter. So, even if you have committed a crime, or done something heinously evil, you can still be enlightened. This can also be an example of Buddhist Hell.

<sup>9</sup> Sangha – community of Buddhist believers

**Question:** What happens if a person who practices Buddhism commits suicide? What is their fate?

**RH:** In Buddhism it is understood that our life is borrowed. We receive this life.

Generally it is believed that each of us owns our individual life: "My life is my own." The reality is we are borrowing this life that we have been given and we have to maintain it. Our life is also being supported by other lives. No one can actually live on their own without the support of other life. For example, if we hold our breath for 5 or 10 minutes, we would die. We can't survive without air. Nor can we survive without water, light or food. All these things are essential for maintaining life. That is why we are alive.

When someone commits suicide, they are terminating a life bestowed to them. It's the same as murdering another person, or taking another person's life. Thus, by committing suicide you are murdering yourself. But a person who commits suicide doesn't know that their life does not belong to them. They die without knowing the real meaning of life. After you have committed suicide you will suffer until you come to understand the meaning of life. And you will suffer in Hell until you realize committing suicide is against the True Law. It is the same as being given a very difficult problem to solve. If you know how to solve the problem, you wouldn't need to suffer. But if you don't know how to solve the problem, even though the problem has a solution, it will take a long time, with you struggling and agonizing over it until you realize the correct answer. Once you realize the correct answer and realize your life is borrowed and not owned by you, you will be given a new life, and you will return to the world as a new life. But it will take time.

**Question:** Can someone be in Buddhist Hell even while they are alive?

**RH:** The stories in the sutra are almost like children's fairytales. Through these stories the truth is conveyed. Some of the events in these stories can't possibly happen. But some of the stories are true. The same is true of comics and fairytales in the secular realm. "Winnie the Pooh" and "Donald Duck" are imaginary. They don't really exist. Most importantly, however, is the moral message these stories convey, which we need to learn. One needs to do a deep read into the stories to grasp the message they are trying to deliver. Likewise, Devadatta falling while alive into Hell when he fell into a crevice in the earth, is not possible. Or Shakyamuni visiting Devadatta in Hell. It is impossible that one can be alive in Hell. When reading these stories, we have to determine what message is being conveyed. What is the Buddha trying to tell us. And we have to receive the message that is being transmitted through these stories.

Our life consists of five elements: Earth (*chi*). Water (*shi*). Fire (*ka*). Wind (*chu*). Space (*ku*). In today's terms this would be considered *quantum* particles, the smallest or even smaller particles. When you reduce whatever matter there is in this world, including the five elements,

to the minutest nano-particles, that is where all lives are equal. When all these things integrate, life is created. The five elements which form life express Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō.

Our lives are all connected, forming one Big Ocean. One drop from that Big Ocean combined with the five elements form a life. The life created could be human, or animal, or plant. Depending on the causes and conditions, life will miraculously be created.

The origin of all things is the same. There should be no hierarchy between life forms. A human being is not better than an animal. Humans, however, have the tendency to rank the value of different lives and different forms of life even though human life is supported by all other forms of life.

From the moment you are born, to the end of your life it seems that life is finite. But the creation of life begins in the Big Ocean of life. In the *jigage* section of the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter (*Juryō*) of the Lotus Sutra<sup>10</sup> is a passage that reads: *Hoben gen nehan*. This means your life has a beginning and an end. But the next two phrases: *ni jitsu fu metsu do / jo jō ju shi seppo*, indicate that that is an illusion because life is eternal. You happened to have been given a life, and life is eternal. When you die the five elements that composed your life will scatter and you will return to the Big Ocean.

**Question:** How can someone who is deceased have perception of what one did while alive. We have been taught that our life, upon death, returns to the great ocean, and has no memory. This is my doubt about Hell after one is dead.

**RH:** This is the ultimate Buddhist teaching. It's very difficult to explain. But because you have asked this question, I want to explain it because it is important.

From one drop of the Big Ocean of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō we are born. However, once we are born we tend to forget about the Big Ocean of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō. Some people form their own opinions, while others believe the doctrine of different religions. Each and every person believes in what they feel is right for them, and have confidence in their belief so that they can keep living. Some people cannot believe in the True Law. They fear that they are going against God or against Buddha and will be punished and suffer. Nevertheless, life is about whether you are living with the Law or living opposed to the Law. It is not about opposing or adhering to God or Buddha. If you oppose the Law, you will suffer in Buddhist Hell. It is like mixing water and oil. They don't blend well. When you are alive, you don't remember what negative or positive things you did in the past. Your existence is the combination of the five elements, the causes made in previous existences, the intent behind those causes, and the connections or relations you have had. These things are remembered after death. It's not really a memory. Rather it exists as a mixture of all things which constitute

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<sup>10</sup> Jigage section of the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter (*Juryō*) of the Lotus Sutra – the verse section of this chapter that begins with, “Jiga toku burrai.”

your life. If you believe in the Law of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō, all those things of which your life is composed will instantly return to the Big Ocean. But if you don't believe in the Law, you will not return to the Big Ocean immediately; and you will suffer.

After saying this, I must admit, it is very difficult to explain.

**Question:** If someone is not aware of the Law and has not encountered the Law in their lifetime, where do these souls go if they don't rejoin the Big Ocean?

**RH:** They don't go directly to the Big Ocean. It will take a long time for them to get there. They will gradually merge into the Big Ocean. It's like trying to mix oil and water. As I said, they don't blend immediately. If one keeps trying, it gradually mixes together. However, until the soul merges with the Big Ocean there will be suffering just like water and oil which fight each other, resisting the blending together. Some of the human consciousness will remain while a soul is trying to merge.



## ANSWER TO QUESTIONS

FROM

**A.I. BOT, BING**

**Reverend Raidō Hirota**

**International Meeting**

**May / June 2023**

**Bing: What is NAMU-MYŌHŌ-RENKE-KYŌ?**

**Reverend Raidō Hirota (RH):** Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō is the core of the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha who lived in Japan during the 13<sup>th</sup> century, based his religion on the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra, in which this Buddhist Law is described, was taught by Shakyamuni Buddha about 3,000 years ago in India. It was taught during the last eight years of the Buddha's life, and is Shakyamuni's highest teaching.

## NAMU

When Shakyamuni taught about the Law in India, he used the word “Namas” (Namu). “Namu” derives from Sanskrit and means “devotion with one’s life.”

At the time the Buddhist teachings were introduced in China, the Chinese vocabulary had not developed enough for the word “Namu” to be translated into Chinese. “Namu” was instead expressed phonetically with Chinese characters in accord with its sound, and had the meaning of “believing with one’s whole life.”

When the Buddhist teachings were introduced to Japan, they were not transcribed into Japanese characters. The same Chinese characters were retained, but they were pronounced in Japanese. The meaning of “Namu” in Japanese is also the same as in Chinese: “believing with one’s whole life.”

## MYŌ

In Japanese, “Myō” means “wonder.” Something strange, extraordinary, mysterious. “Myō” is an adjective that expresses a positive strangeness, something wonderful. A beautiful image. A wonder sound. Something that possesses a beautiful or wonderful feature.

Contained within “Myōhō” is the concept of an imperfect person who makes all kinds of mistakes, is not a good person, and yet this person can become Buddha. This is the greatest and most magnificent wonder. This is the teaching of “Myō” that is taught in the Lotus Sutra. And the Lotus Sutra is full of wonders. “Myōhō” is the Law that explains these wonders. Before he taught the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni, over the course of more than 40 years, taught many, many other sutras. In these sutras he taught that human beings could not become Buddha unless they removed all their doubts and imperfections. It was, therefore, nearly impossible for human beings to become Buddha. Once the Lotus Sutra was taught, and due to the Law that it professed, anyone, whether they lived in the right way or the wrong way, could become Buddha. This is “Myōhō.”

**HŌ = LAW**

**MYŌHŌ = WONDERFUL LAW, MYSTIC LAW**

## RENGE

“Renge” means Lotus flower. Shakyamuni used the metaphor of the lotus flower to explain the nature of “Myōhō.”

The lotus is a very large plant that produces leaves as large as 2 to 3 feet or more, and its flowers can grow nearly as big. The lotus flower has a distinctive cone-shaped yellow seed pod at its center, which is the female reproductive structure. Encircling the seed pod are rows of stamens that are the male reproductive organs. There are some varieties of lotus flowers as well that self-pollinate. The seeds become evident in the mature flower before the petals fall off. This makes the plant a complete entity. Thus, this exquisitely beautiful and impressive

flower is a perfect example of flowering plants that contain both flower and seeds at the same time. This is probably why Shakyamuni chose the lotus flower, the national flower of India, as the metaphor for the Buddhist Law.

The aspect of the Law that the lotus flower - "Renge"- represents is the simultaneity of cause and effect. This causal phenomenon is known as *inga guji* in Buddhism. The blossom represents the effect, and the seeds, which exist at the same time when the flower is still in bloom, represent the cause. Likewise, MyōhōRengeKyō is both the cause of enlightenment (Buddhahood), and the effect – enlightenment (Buddhahood) itself. Everything exists in one entity. The entity of human life and all life is MyōhōRengeKyō. And chanting MyōhōRengeKyō opens it.

Human beings are conceived by two parents, a mother and a father. A child is created by a mother and father coming together. The parents are the cause and the child is the effect. When the child matures, they have within them the potential or cause to give birth to another child. Thus the effect (the child) becomes the cause when the child has matured. It is all connected. Human life is connected to eternal life. A single human being exists in eternal life. However, it is misunderstood that because human beings are born they will die and life will end there. This is not true. Birth and death are a part of the continuum of eternal life. "Myōhō" is eternal life. Human life is Buddha life. This is the same as cause and effect. It's the same as the flower and the seed existing together in one plant. It's a continuous life. And everyone can become Buddha. "Myōhō," the wonderful Law, is like the lotus flower that has both cause and result together in it. Cause and effect are absolute.

A unique feature of the lotus plant is that it only grows in muddy, swampy water, which symbolizes the emergence of Buddha life out of the sullied lives of all human beings through the practice of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō.

## KYŌ

"Kyō" is the teaching that explains that human life is the same as Buddha life, and everyone can become Buddha.

妙 法 蓮 華 經	{
MIAO-FA-LIEN-HUA-CHING	{ Chinese
	{

妙 法 蓮 華 經	{
MYŌ HŌ REN GE KYŌ	{ Japanese
	{

THE TEACHING OF THE WONDERFUL LAW OF CAUSE AND EFFECT { English



## **Bing: What is the essence of life?**

**RH:** In Buddhism, the purpose of life is the same as the essence of life.

In Buddhism we say enlightenment means that me and all people, as well as all life wake up to the truth that we all can become Buddha. Awakening to the realization that we were born in this world to become Buddha is enlightenment.

Each human being endeavors to establish a purpose for his or her life. They will study to gain knowledge to advance themselves. They will invent things to improve their life and make life easier, more convenient, faster and more immediate. And they will pursue acquiring material things and wealth. Human beings spend their entire life trying to have a better life. All these human endeavors are unlike Buddhist teachings. Nothing about developing culture, science, technology, medicine or the economy is written in Buddhist texts. Buddhism does not promote or encourage these efforts. It does not promote competition. What Buddhism teaches is that we should not get lost in this materialistic way of looking at life. Realizing that every life has Buddha-life is more important than spending your life on superficial pursuits.

Animals and plants can also become Buddha because they have Buddha-life or Buddha-nature too. But the most important thing is, unlike other species, human beings have the ability to think. How should humans use their this ability? We should use it to awaken to the awareness that all life harbors the precious life of Buddha. This is what Buddhism teaches.

There are many people who are Buddhists who don't think this way. What I mean is, when people are chanting the same phrase *Nan<sup>11</sup>MyōhōRengeKyō*, someone viewing them from the outside see people chanting the same thing. But some people may be chanting to recover from illness; some may be chanting to resolve a financial problem; some may be chanting for a promotion; some may be chanting for a new love interest. These are things that people chant for. But the true way to chant is: to *feel* the Buddha-life inside each of us; to be aware that all life, including our own, has Buddha-life; to continue to accumulate this feeling of the presence of Buddha inside us; and to reflect on our life and recognize that "someone like me, who makes lots of mistakes," can still have Buddha-life inside them. It is only through chanting that one learns and realizes that each life possesses the precious Buddha-life. When you observe people chanting, you can't tell what they are thinking. For example, there believers who maybe thinking only of their own happiness, while ignoring or not caring about the happiness of others. Or they may be chanting for harm to come to someone else. It is wrong to chant just for your own happiness. And it is wrong to invoke *NanMyōhōRengeKyō* for any negative purpose. What is important is that in order to realize the essence of life one must have the right mind, the right direction, the right teaching, and the right faith in *Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō*.

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<sup>11</sup> Nan – when chanting, *Namu* is pronounced *Nan* because the flow is naturally easier.





## **Bing: How can I practice Nam-myohō-renge-kyō?**

**RH:** There are four fundamental pillars in the practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. They are faith (*shin*), practice (*gyō*), study (*gaku*) and *shakubuku*. Faith (*shin*) means to believe. Practice (*gyō*) is to practice. Study (*gaku*) is to study and learn. *Shakubuku* is to transmit the Law of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō to others in order for others to form a connection to the Law of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō.

### **FAITH**

Faith is to believe and thereby accumulate the merits of the four pillars by exerting oneself.

### **PRACTICE**

Practice consists of reciting the Japanese pronunciation of two chapters (the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup>) of the Lotus Sutra every morning and evening, and chanting *NanMyōhōRengeKyō*. This practice is called *gongyo*.

Chanting *NanMyōhōRengeKyō* is the primary practice. As explained earlier, the title of the Lotus Sutra, as pronounced in Japanese, is MyōhōRengeKyō. As explained earlier, *Namu* means devotion with one’s whole life. *Myō* means strange, mysterious, wonderful. *Hō* means law. *Renge* is cause and effect. Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō thus means I believe in, and devote my life to the mysterious Law of the Lotus Sutra. And we chant *NanMyōhōRengeKyō* continuously.

Recitation of the two chapters of the Lotus Sutra and the chanting of *NanMyōhōRengeKyō* are the teachings the Buddha taught us. It may seem strange that we chant and recite exactly what we are being taught. If, for example, a teacher or a parent said to us, “do this,” we would not repeat back to them, “do this.” If we did, it would sound silly, rude or even sassy if we repeated back to them what they are saying. So, why do we chant the exact words of the Buddha’s teaching? It is because when we chant our whole body is engaged: our voice speaks the words of the Buddha; our ears hear the Buddha’s words we are chanting; what is heard in our ears is delivered to our heart; and in our minds we are repeating words the Buddha taught. Through our chanting in the morning and evening, which is heard in our ears, the teachings of the Buddha are touching our heart.

The reason we do *gongyo* is to remind ourselves that we are listening to the Buddha teaching or preaching. Human beings are creatures who easily forget things. If we could listen just once and have no doubts it would be acceptable to only listen once. But even if we hear something over and over again, we still forget. By listening to the teachings of the Buddha

every morning and evening we are reminded, and we remember. But if we forget sometimes, or have doubts, by chanting the sutra and Law of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō every day, and listening to these teachings of the Buddha, we evolve and more forward. This is Practice.

## STUDY

Study (*gaku*) means to study and learn about the teachings or the content of the Lotus Sutra, as well as learning about the mind and life of Nichiren Daishonin: how, through his letters and writings, he lived his life and how, and what, he taught to believers. By studying and learning we can apply the teachings to our own lives, as well as reflect on how we think and how we are living our lives.

## SHAKUBUKU

Shakubuku, or propagation is not about forcing or pushing our ideas on someone else. It is to tell someone that the religion we believe in is based on the teaching of the Law of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō, and give the reason why we have faith in this religion. It doesn't matter if the other person believes what we say or not. That is for the other person to decide. We do not coerce someone to take faith in our religion, especially not to increase the number of believers. What is most important is that we try to explain the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin in a way that is reasonable in order to create a connection between the other person and the Law. And in doing so, it offers us a beneficial opportunity to reflect on our own faith. This is Shakubuku.

**Question:** Does Bing have a Buddha nature?

**RH:** The teaching of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō is that water, rocks, light, the minutest quantum particles, which are so small that they are not even visible, have Buddha-life or Buddha-nature. There is no hierarchy in life. Human life is not the most important, and all other life is not inferior to human life. Even the smallest particle of life that one can imagine is equal to all other life, including human life. Human beings cannot communicate with rocks and sand, yet all these things have the mind of Buddha in it, without exception. This is the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. (The mind of Buddha is Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō. The Buddha life is Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō.)



# GOSHO SELECTION

## *Excerpt*

### THE ESSENCE OF THE YAKUO CHAPTER

Concerning the general meaning of this chapter called the Yakuo, the Yakuo chapter is in the seventh volume and is the twenty-third of the twenty-eight chapters that make up the Lotus Sutra.

....

The Yakuo chapter, therefore, is a chapter that explains how one ought to carry out the teachings both of the eight chapters beginning with the Hoben chapter and of the Juryo chapter.

This chapter, the Yakuo, contains ten analogies, the first of which is the analogy of the great ocean. I will begin by explaining this analogy in outline form. In the southern continent of Jambudvipa there are 2,500 rivers; in the western continent of Goddriya there are 5,000 rivers. In all the four continents there are a total of 25,000 rivers. Some of these rivers are forty ri in length, some a hundred ri, some only one ri, one chu or one fathom. However, concerning the matter of depth, not one of these rivers can match the great ocean.

Among all the sutras, such as the Kegon; Agon, Hodo, Hannya, Jimmitsu, Amida, Nirvana, Dainichi, Kongonchi, Soshitsuji and Mitsugon sutras, all the sutras preached by Shakyamuni Buddha, all the sutras preached by Dainichi Buddha, all the sutras preached by Amida Buddha, all the sutras preached by Yakushi Buddha, and all the sutras preached by the various Buddhas of the three existences of past, present and future-among all these sutras, the Lotus Sutra stands foremost. Thus these other sutras are analogous to the large rivers, middle-sized rivers and small rivers, while the Lotus Sutra is analogous to the great ocean.

The ocean possesses ten virtues or outstanding characteristics in which it surpasses rivers. First of all, the floor of the ocean becomes increasingly deeper, which is not true of rivers. Second, the ocean will not provide a resting place for a corpse, which is not true of rivers. Third, the ocean obliterates the names of the various rivers that flow into it, while rivers retain their names. Fourth, the water of the ocean has a single uniform taste, while this is not true of rivers. Fifth, the ocean contains various treasures that are not found in rivers. Sixth, the ocean is extremely deep, which is not true of rivers. Seventh, the ocean is boundless in breadth, which rivers are not. Eighth, the ocean houses creatures of great size, which is not true of rivers. Ninth, the ocean has tides that ebb and flow, but rivers do not. And tenth, the ocean absorbs

the waters of torrential rains or huge rivers without ever overflowing, but this is not true of rivers.

The Lotus Sutra likewise has ten virtues, while the other sutras have ten faults. In the case of this sutra the benefits gained from it increase in depth and bounty, and they continue down to the fiftieth person who hears of it.' In the case of the other Sutras, however, there is no benefit to be gained even by the first person who hears them, much less by the second, third or fourth person, and so on down to the fiftieth person.

Though rivers may be deep, their depth cannot match even the shallow places of the ocean. And though the various other sutras may claim that a single character or a single phrase of theirs or the ten meditations are capable of encompassing those who are suffering from the evil effects of the ten evil acts or the five cardinal sins, such benefits cannot match those gained by the fiftieth person who hears a single character or a single phrase of the Lotus Sutra and responds with joy.

In the case of the Lotus Sutra, just as the ocean will not provide a resting place for a corpse, so a person who slanders the Law by turning against the Lotus Sutra will be cast out by the sutra, even though in other respects he may be an individual of extreme goodness. And how much more so will this be true in the case of an evil person who, in addition to his other evil acts, slanders the Law! Though one may speak slanderously of the other sutras, if he does not turn his back upon the Lotus Sutra, he is certain to attain the Buddha way. But though he may put his faith in all the other sutras, if he turns his back upon the Lotus Sutra, he will invariably fall into the great citadel of the Avichi hell.

I move now to the eighth virtue of the ocean, the fact that it can house creatures of great size. And we find that in the ocean there are huge fish known as makara? The place called the hell of incessant suffering measures eighty thousand yojana in total length and breadth. But when a person falls into the hell of incessant suffering by committing one of the five cardinal sins, this person alone is sufficient to fill it up completely. Thus we know that the inhabitants of this hell, persons who have committed one or more of the five cardinal sins, are beings of very great size.

In the other sutras, which we have likened to small rivers or large rivers, no makara fish are to be found. However, in the great ocean that is the Lotus Sutra, they do exist. And in like manner, the other sutras do not in fact state that persons who commit one or more of the five cardinal sins are capable of attaining the Buddha way. Or, even if the sutras do state this, in fact the true principle has yet to be revealed in them.

Therefore the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai Chih-che, who had memorized all the sacred teachings of the Buddha's lifetime, says in his commentary on the Lotus Sutra: "The other sutras merely predict Buddhahood for bodhisattvas but not for persons in the two vehicles. They predict Buddhahood merely for the good but not for the evil.... This sutra predicts Buddhahood for all living beings." But I will not go into details on this matter. . . .

# Oeshiki

OCTOBER 13, 1282



At 8:00 am on the 13<sup>th</sup> day of the 10<sup>th</sup> month in the year 1282, at the age of 61, Nichiren Daishonin passed away. While October 13<sup>th</sup> is the date of the Daishonin's death, it is not a day of mourning. October 13 is *Oeshiki*. It is a holiday; a day of great celebration. It is the most important ceremony in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.

*Oeshiki*, or "Founder's Day" is a celebration of Daishonin's true, eternal Law, which was revealed through his endurance of the austere practices and persecutions described in the Lotus Sutra. Though the Daishonin died, the Buddha nature – the life of Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō itself – never dies; it is eternal. Thus we celebrate *Oeshiki* to affirm the eternal life of the

Buddha.

*Oeshiki* is also an affirmation of the treatise "Rissho Ankoku Ron"<sup>12</sup>. In this treatise Nichiren Daishonin makes clear that we must practice the Mystic Law and perceive enlightenment for ourselves. It also warns that we must believe in Namu-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō, or we will never achieve peace.

To celebrate this most important day, you should make paper cherry blossoms and decorate the left and right sides of the Gohonzon. We do this 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, the national flower of India, symbolizes the teachings of Shakyamuni. Buddhism arrived in Japan during the second millennium following Shakyamuni's death. Then during the Latter Day of the Law, more than 2000 years after Shakyamuni passed away the essence of Buddhism was elucidated by Nichiren Daishonin in Japan. The cherry blossom, the national flower of Japan, symbolizes the passage of true Buddhism to Japan.

To get together to do gongyo and daimoku, and read the letters of the Nichiren Daishonin and the various high priests on this day, is both sacred and blessed.

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<sup>12</sup> Rissho Ankoku Ron – "On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism."

# *Celebrate Oeshiki*



*Sanbo-in Altar  
Decorated with paper cherry blossoms*