**THE PRACTICE and MEANING OF OKŌ**



**and**

**CORRECT BELIEF and FAITH**

**Reverend Raidō Hirota**

**International Meeting**

In This Issue

Okō 1

Correct Attitude During

Gongyo 9

The Function of the Gods 13

The Law Revealed by

Nichiren Daishonin 15

Q&A on Embracing the

Lotus Sutra 18

**November / December 2018**

We chant *okō*, the Buddhist service of reciting chapters 2 and 16 of the Lotus Sutra[[1]](#footnote-1) and chanting Odaimoku[[2]](#footnote-2), which is the practice called gongyo, every morning and evening. It is now the morning of November 27th in Japan. A short while ago I did morning gongyo, and now I did evening gongyo together here with you, because it is evening where most of you are, or the middle of the night.

***The Middle Way***

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Our practice requires us to do gongyo morning and evening every day. I know that everybody has a very busy life. Busy with work. Busy with family. Busy with parenting. When each gongyo takes about an hour, it’s a very demanding thing to do within a busy, busy life. I’m not sure if there is any other religion that requires a commitment to practice two hours a day. I don’t really know what other religions do. But we have been practicing this way from the beginning because it is what Nichiren Daishonin[[3]](#footnote-3) did. This is how he practiced. He taught all believers that all believers should do gongyo and Ōdaimoku twice a day, every day, for two hours a day. He not only practiced this way himself, he practiced this way with believers too. And since the Daishonin’s time, this tradition has continued—and will continue into the future.

When we recite gongyo, we are chanting towards the Lotus Sutra that the Buddha taught us. In the Lotus Sutra Buddha is telling us what to do: you have to do this, or you shouldn’t do what is bad. All of this is included in the *okō* service that we do morning and evening. We are repeating to the Buddha what we learn from the Buddha: “do this, or don’t do bad things.” It’s a little strange. The Buddha is telling us “don’t do bad things,” and we are repeating back, “don’t do bad things.” There is a Japanese proverb, “preaching for the Buddha.” Basically, that means, in school you learn from the teacher, and as a student you repeat back to the teacher—or teach the teacher—what you have learned, confirming to the teacher what you had learned from the teacher. So, when you do *okō* – reciting gongyo and chanting Ōdaimoku – you are confirming to the Buddha what you learned from the Buddha.

As I said, we are preaching back to the Buddha. It sounds paradoxical. Why do we do such a puzzling thing? We are chanting with our own voice what we learned from Buddha so that our heart and ears will hear what we chant. When we chant the words with our voice, our own ears and heart are listening. And even though it is our own voice, we are listening to the Buddha’s teaching through our own voice. And though it comes out of our mouth, it is delivered to our ears as the Buddha’s voice. This is how we learn back again from the Buddha. It seems as if we are teaching back to Buddha, but actually we are teaching to our own heart using our own voice.

Why do we do this twice a day? The reason is, human beings easily forget. So, even though we are learning while we are chanting, when we finish gongyo we go about our day, living our life, putting ourselves in the center of the world and forgetting what we have just learned. Then we do gongyo later in the day to remind us that we must put the Buddha’s teaching in the center of our life. It’s a circle. We do gongyo and hear the Buddha’s teaching from our own voice and learn that the Law[[4]](#footnote-4) is at the center. Then we go out and live our life thinking we are the center, and that “I am better than anyone else,” and forgetting what we have just learned. Then we return to do gongyo again to remind us that the Law is the center. This cycle continues daily. When we do gongyo we realize that what we thought and felt while going about our life was wrong. And we realize that the values and principles we learn from Buddha are the most important things to have at the center of our life. This is why we do gongyo in the morning and evening. Gongyo recreates the place where the Lotus Sutra was taught.

When your faith is not very strong, it is very difficult to understand all that I have said here. If I tell you or teach you something, and you don’t believe very strongly, then you won’t understand what I am teaching. For example, I became a priest at the age of 12. As a child, I had to learn how to recite *okō* – the liturgy of Nichiren Shosho[[5]](#footnote-5). Elderly and senior priests taught me how to chant and recite properly. This may be shocking to you, but if I could not recite the liturgy properly I was sometimes beaten or kicked by the older priests and repeatedly yelled at again and again How many times did this happen to me? I don’t know. But because I was still a child I was allowed to go out and play after morning gongyo. Then, when it was time for evening gongyo, we had to sit down again to do an hour of gongyo. It was so boring. I struggled not to fall asleep. But because it was boring it was difficult to stay awake, so I would fall asleep. When the senior priests found out I was sleeping, they would beat me and kick me again. Experiencing this horrible abuse day in and day out, over and over again, I felt lost. I questioned why I was subjecting myself to this cruelty. I felt wretched about having to do gongyo. I just really didn’t like doing it. Throughout my childhood this is how I felt. Then I began to ask myself why I felt this way. I realized the issue was that I was not doing gongyo on my own volition. I was constantly being forced to do it by others. I thought about running away from the temple. Or I tried scheming of ways I could prevent being beaten. That’s all I thought about as a kid doing gongyo.

When I got older, I started to study the liturgy on my own —that part of the Lotus Sutra that we recite. That was the first time I realized that having faith, and the practice of faith, is not something you are forced to do or told to do by someone else, which in my case was by the older priests. That is not real faith. Real faith comes from you yourself. You have to do it on your own. You do it on your own, for yourself. This is what I began to realize and understand. Of course, when I was being beaten by the elder priests, I really didn’t like those priests. I even felt I hated them. Then, as I continued to study the liturgy, more and more I came to realize how important *okō* is, and the reason the older priests tried to instill in me the necessity of putting my faith into my recitation of the sutra is because gongyo it is so important. That is why they were so hard on me. It was not because they were abusive and enjoyed beating me. They acted out of compassion to impress upon me just how important the recitation of the liturgy is. But it was not until I was older and began to study on my own that I came to understand this.

Faith and practice are not something you can be forced to do. Nor are they something you have or do only when someone is watching, or you are in the company of others. That is not faith. That is not practice. It has to come from you. Chanting Ōdaimoku and reciting gongyo are what you are supposed to do even when no one is watching. When you are alone. You should not feel, “Oh, no one is watching, so I don’t have to do this.”

Sometimes you think, “it’s so early in the morning,” or “I have to wake up so early to do this. I’m busy. I’m so tired. I’m so sleepy, and I have to go to work.” Well, that may be, but stop using excuses. Start getting ready the day before. Try to wake up earlier and do your chanting. That is having faith. It’s a long hour. But if you think about athletes and what they go through. There is no easy way for an athlete to improve his or her ability. No athlete can win at their sport without continuous practice. If you don’t practice, you cannot show good results. As it is with sports, the same is true for any endeavor in life. Everyone is working hard to improve for themselves—for their own interest. It’s not that you are practicing for someone else. You are practicing for yourself. You are having faith for yourself.

I am not saying that everyone will feel the same way that I felt—that you will understand the faith after many years of pain. That is not what I’m trying to say; that is not the case. Each person will have a totally different path to get there. The main thing is, faith is not something you are forced to have, or that you are ordered to have. It’s not that you are having faith because you belong to an organization. It’s not that you have faith because of me. These are not reasons to have faith. You have faith for yourself, and you have faith by yourself. You are not having faith—you are not chanting and reciting gongyo for show— when you only chant in the company of other people. Doing gongyo is the moment when you reflect on yourself. When you look at yourself. That is the reason we do gongyo. It doesn’t matter who is looking at you, or who is not looking at you.

It’s very important that you do not skip gongyo. And when you are chanting, you should start feeling that at that moment you are there learning the teaching. So I hope everyone will take gongyo very seriously and realize how very important it is. This is my sincerest wish.

**Question:** Is there such a thing as the “Weeping Buddha”? Is that a sect of Buddhism? A friend of a friend worships this Buddha.

**Reverend Hirota (RH):** I just recently heard about the “Weeping Buddha” for the first time. I had never heard of it before. It’s not only the “Weeping Buddha” group, there are all kinds of groups, even in Japan, who worship different Buddhas. For instance, there is a group called the “Headless Buddha.” That group worships a statue of a Buddha without a head. There’s also a Buddha statue that people go to to have a healthy baby. There’s Buddha who people believe is very effective in treating eye ailments. You name it, there are Buddhas for all kinds of body parts. For example, if you have a problem with your legs, you go to the “Leg Buddha.” If you have a problem with your back, you go to another Buddha. And the strange thing is, there is a temple where someone went to pray and afterwards won the lottery. Once everyone heard of it, they came from all over the country to pray to that Buddha at that temple so they could win the lottery. So, there is even a lottery Buddha. That is common. There are all kinds of groups who are worshipping something.

The big difference is that Nichiren Daishonin taught that there are all kinds of Buddhas, and these Buddhas all became Buddhas because they were enlightened by studying and practicing the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. So, what we need to practice and worship is not the Buddha who is effective for healing each body part. We actually have to learn that the teaching of Namumyōhōrengekyō enlightened all these Buddhas because they had faith in the Law at the very center of their life. Without that you cannot become a Buddha. It is only because they had that faith in and practice of the Law in the center of their life that they became Buddhas. This is what Nichiren Daishonin taught. That was the center of his faith. What he taught was that it was not the Buddha, not the statue of Buddha, but the Law that is the center of faith. He expressed the Law in five or seven *kanji* characters – *Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō* (5) or *Na-mu-myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō* (7) – and taught that this Law is the center of Buddha.

It is not only Buddhism that worships statues or idols. There are religions all over the world that worship statues or any other thing you can think of to worship and ask for personal benefit. However, the most important thing is that the center of Buddha is the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. To worship what is at the center of Buddha is the most important thing to worship and not any figure or idol. I really hope you can tell your friend that it is not the “Weeping Buddha”, or any Buddha or figure that should be worshipped. It is what is inside the “Weeping Buddha,” that without which he could not have become a Buddha, that should be worshipped. Because he had the Law inside, he became a Buddha. Tell your friend, the most important thing is not the figure; it’s the Law that is in the center.

All over the world there are all kinds of religious groups. Every group has their own way of thinking. They each think that the true and righteous faith is the one they belong to—their organization, religion or group. Belonging to that group, religion or organization is considered faith. But that is wrong. Even today, we are a group of people gathering to study. Although we are gathering, studying, and learning, it does not mean that we are the correct group. That is not how it works. For us being together means we are making a connection or developing a relationship with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Through this relationship with the Law that is our connection. We are having faith through this connection. This is the same as I mentioned concerning gongyo. I will tell you that it is important to do gongyo, but whether you do gongyo or not is all up to you. You are the one who will decide if you are going to do gongyo or not. You are the one who decides if you believe in this teaching or not. You are the one who decides if you are going to practice or not. Your faith is not correct because you belong to a certain group of people. That’s not the way it is. It is not where you belong, or what group you are. That is not faith. Faith is your heart. If your heart is with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, that is the true faith.

Some people believe that the organization is equal to faith. But an organization is just a group of people who have gathered together. And when people gather, human beings always make mistakes. Its normal for people to gather and create a group or organization. And of course, there will be some mistakes made. That happens. And when you are in an organization and believe your organization is correct, you start to believe that the organization is the most important thing, and you have to protect it, protect the people in it, and that the higher-ranking members of the organization are all correct, or that the one authority figure is the center of the organization and is more important than the Law. People then tend to protect the authority figures before they protect the teaching of the Law.

The object of faith is the Law. The Law is the center of faith. The above description of how an organization can operate is backwards, or going in the wrong direction, away from faith. It’s going against faith. Organizations create their own rules. And if you try to leave that organization, you would be considered a trader, or someone who has betrayed the organization because you are leaving what the organization believes is faith. There is no faith in belonging to an organization. To belong to something is not faith. I repeat: the center of faith is the Law. When you have the Law in the center, that is the basis of faith. If you are going to have faith, you should belong to an organization that does not put the organization in the center. The Law should always be put in the center. And when you are gathering with people who have put the Law in the center, that is the correct thing to do.

**Question:** Since everyone has the Buddha nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō, if you practice Namumyōhōrengekyō, whether it’s to a statue, a picture or Gohonzon[[6]](#footnote-6) it shouldn’t matter what is in front of you as long as you chant Namumyōhōrengekyō, because Namumyōhōrengekyō is at the center of everything. Is that what you are saying?

**RH:** The people who believe in the “Weeping Buddha” don’t go beyond the “Weeping Buddha”. They stop right there. They are not learning about what is inside the Buddha—what made the “Weeping Buddha” a Buddha. They are fixated on the result—the figure of the Buddha itself. Our group is the group that believes in the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, and are putting the Law in the center. We have a connection to this group of people because we believe in the same thing – the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. The “Weeping Buddha” sect does not believe in the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. They believe that their center is the “Weeping Buddha” and not what is actually inside the “Weeping Buddha.”

As I just explained, large organizations use their organization as the basis of faith, and that the hierarchy and higher ranking officials are more important than the Law. The money they amass, the benefits they get, and the number of believers they attract is what is most important. The leaders of these groups are considered a living Buddha. These groups are misunderstanding what faith is. Our group is not like that. We are not organization-based, or group-based. We are a group of people gathering because we have the same faith, which is the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin, who taught that all life is equal, and that every single life possesses Buddha’s life. No matter what kind of life it is, it has the life of Buddha inside. I’ve been repeating this over and over because that is the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin. Every single life is the same. Every single life is equal and has Buddha’s life inside. If you believe in the Law, no matter who you are, you can become Buddha. We all believe in this teaching and are making a connection because we gather together to learn this teaching. We don’t gather to be a part of a group. We gather to study and learn the teaching together. We all have the same faith. You cannot learn this teaching from anyone. For example, though the daikon radish is an Asian root vegetable, these days you can get it anywhere in the world. But that is not true of this teaching. You cannot learn this teaching from just anyone—any Buddhist sect—in the world. This teaching of Namumyōhōrengekyō is from Nichiren Daishonin. You cannot go to any Buddhist sect or teacher to learn this teaching. It doesn’t work that way.

Besides Buddhism, there is Christianity, Islam, Judaism and other religions in the world. Their beliefs, such as God created the world, Noah’s ark, the nonexistence of evolution, God created humans and just placed them on earth, are unreasonable and don’t make sense. That kind of nonsense is the center of the teachings that are dominant in the world today. In Japan, Buddhist religions teach that people should not think. They are taught to be silent, passive, and if you follow Buddha you will be saved. That’s the kind of nonsense religion that exists in Japan. Within these kinds of Western and Eastern religions there are people who find the doctrine hard to believe, but they don’t question or oppose it. They remain silent and hold on to their feelings and thoughts even though they think there is something wrong with the doctrine. They’re forced to believe, and are told that that is part of what faith is in their religion.

The teaching of Nichiren Daishonin removes all this nonsense and unreasonable thinking, and has reason as its basis of faith. Reason is equal to or the same in all life. Unreasonable things are very unfair. That kind of teaching is created by a person who is favoring those people who are leading a religion. As I’ve mentioned so often, the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyō[[7]](#footnote-7) states that everyone has the Buddha nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō. And if everyone practices, then everyone can become a Buddha. There is nothing so reasonable in any other teaching.

Going back to *okō*, the True Teaching does not belong to any organization. The True Teaching is beyond time, country, ethnicity, group of people, words, language, space, and of course any organization. The True Teaching is eternal, everlasting, permanent, without ever changing. Because it is so correct it lasts forever. An organization-based teaching is not like that. The thing that lasts forever, surpassing all things is the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

I know everyone has a busy life and may find it hard to do gongyo, but please do gongyo for yourself.

**THE CORRECT ATTITUDE DURING GONGYO**

**Reverend Raidō Hirota**

**International Meeting**

**July 2013**

**Question:** **What attitude or state of mind should we attempt to put ourselves in when we chant Ōdaimoku and gongyo? Should our attitude be different when we chant for our problems and spiritual growth compared to when we chant for others who are ill, or for others to see the truths of Buddhism? How does chanting affect ourselves and the world around us?**

**RH:** When we do okō and chant Ōdaimoku in the morning and evening, we recite and chant the same thing every day. What you think about is that it is the Buddha’s teaching. But when you are chanting it, it’s as though you are speaking to the Buddha. You are repeating what you learn from the teaching to the teacher. As I mentioned earlier, the reason you say it with your own voice is so that when you hear it with your own ears, it is coming back to you as the Buddha’s teaching. By chanting, you are recreating the scene on Eagle Peak[[8]](#footnote-8) where the Buddha was expounding the Lotus Sutra to his audience. Many people might think, “I am chanting this with my own power and my own being.” However, it is not your action. By chanting you are repeatedly saying, “I have Buddha nature in me. I have Buddha nature in me.” So, when you are chanting, your Buddha nature is speaking to Buddha. When you chant, it is a communication between a Buddha and a Buddha. It is not one individual named “X” who is chanting. It is the Buddha nature in “X” that is conversing with Buddha. Therefore, by doing this every day for years and years, you are repeatedly reminding yourself that you have Buddha nature inside you. That is why you are chanting. That is the attitude to have when you chant.

Imagine a student asking a teacher how he or she should be listening to what the teacher is teaching. What kind of attitude he or she should have when listening to the teacher. The answer would be, “Absorb it.” Soak it in without prejudice or preconceived ideas. Just hear it as it is being presented. Later, based on your life experience and critical thinking, integrate the knowledge you gain into your own life. When you chant Ōdaimoku and recite gongyo, do it with no expectations. No thinking. Take it in as it is. That is the optimal and most correct way to practice.

You ask how you should pray for a family member or friend who is sick to get better. If a person becomes physically ill, it may be that the person does not have that long to live. Or it may be that the person can be cured or can survive the illness and be well. You just don’t know. There are a lot of factors involved. For instance, was it the correct diagnosis, the correct doctor(s), the proper treatment, the best medicines, a supportive environment, your karma, etc. Your belief in this religion is not going to cure everything.

In addition to physical illness, there is also spiritual and emotional illness. When someone becomes physically ill the soul also becomes sick. As a result, some people come to realize what the most important thing is in his or her life. Since I don’t know whether chanting will or won’t cure someone, when I visit a believer who is physically ill, I say to them 1) Don’t let yourself become spiritually ill, and 2) Don’t stop chanting. And when I chant for a sick person, I don’t chant for them to be cured. Instead, I pray that their faith will become even deeper than before, and that they realize that they have the Buddha nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō inside them.

In Japan, when people are sick, or when their life is at a crossroads and seems uncertain, people go to a shrine to buy an amulet (good luck charm) for protection. Or they buy a fortune that tells them what to do in certain circumstances. But in this religion, there isn’t such a thing. Human beings have a weakness for tangible things—things you touch, things you can carry around. Somehow these things make them feel more secure. In our religion, however, we practice Ōdaimoku which is at the heart of everything. Ōdaimoku is a sure thing and more precious to have than any amulet or fortune that tells you what to do. Yet, because humans can more easily believe in something that is visible, physical--something they can see and touch—they don’t trust the invisible. Because it can’t be seen, it seems incomplete. But you can’t see your heart either.

When Soka Gakkai[[9]](#footnote-9) members get sick, they say, “When I get well I will do more for this practice. So please make me better.” The Gakkai teaches this as a technique to deepen their practice. These are not the words of a practitioner of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings.

There is no amulet or fortune you can buy in this Buddhism. We have Gohonzon. Gohonzon is like a mirror reflecting the Buddha nature inside us. Gohonzon is not an object that you ask to give me this, give me that, make me this way or that way. But that is what SGI is doing or teaching, which is the same as other religions in this world. We can’t do that. That is not the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin.

**Question:** The Lotus Sutra states, “You will receive salvation from suffering.” Is that correct?

**RH:** If you understand the word “salvation” to mean that when you are sick and you chant you will get better, then that understanding is incorrect. Salvation in this Buddhism, as referred to in the Lotus Sutra, is realizing and acknowledging that you have Buddha nature in you. It is to reach Buddhahood. If you interpret salvation in this way, then that is correct.

**Question:** It is very difficult to explain the correct teaching to SGI members because their understanding is so different. It is like a foreign language to them.

**RH:** SGI says if you join their organization and practice with them, you will receive benefits and something good will happen to you. But as I mentioned, human beings have a weakness for tangible things. There are treasures of the storehouse, treasures of the body, and treasures of the heart. Treasurers of the storehouse is financial gain. Treasures of the body is health and physical gratification. And treasurers of the heart are feeling at peace, satisfaction and contentment. Nichiren Daishonin said the most important treasures are the treasurers of the heart. That results in a comfortable way of living. Most people will pursue financial gain and accumulating possessions (the treasurers of the storehouse) as well as physical gratification and health (treasurers of the body) because they equate these with happiness. Yet, in their pursuit and achievement of these, people are never satisfied or secure enough. If you are a true Buddhist, satisfying your heart should be the most important thing. That is not a tangible thing that you can touch or hold in your hand. And people who believe that material things equal happiness, will say that you are just gratifying your ego. But the truth is, religion – faith – equals heart. Within the Buddha’s teachings there are no lessons about making more money or accumulating possessions. So I hope you have a true and honest scale by which to correctly weigh what is right as a Buddhist and what is wrong. Please don’t forget these points. Please practice Buddhism correctly. Remember, where there is heart there may also be material things; but where there are material things there is not necessarily heart. These are things you have to think about when practicing this religion.



**THE FUNCTION OF THE GODS**

**Reverend Raidō Hirota**

**Trenton, New Jersey**

**July 22, 2018**

**Question: In the gosho, Nichiren says he offered such and such to the sun goddess[[10]](#footnote-10), Hachiman[[11]](#footnote-11), or to the Ten Demon Daughters[[12]](#footnote-12), in addition to the Gohonzon. Why is that? When we offer things, it’s only to the Gohonzon, never to any deity, except in the first prayer when we offer the favor of the Law.**

**RH:** Namumyōhōrengekyō is in the center of Gohonzon. Surrounding Namumyōhōrengekyō are the names of all kinds of beings. These are names of people such as Shakyamuni[[13]](#footnote-13) as well as names of deities. Namumyōhōrengekyō is at the center of everything. However, because there is limited space, all that Namumyōhōrengekyō includes could not be written on Gohonzon. Each name that does appear on Gohonzon is, therefore, representing the various categories of beings that Namumyōhōrengekyō is at the center of. So, when Nichiren mentions a name in gratitude, it is the category or group represented by that name, and not a specific person or deity that he is referring to. Namumyōhōrengekyō is not a person or a god. It is a law. It represents everything. At the center of the minds of all these names on Gohonzon is Namumyōhōrengekyō. And it’s a message to remind you that you should have Namumyōhōrengekyō at the center of your mind. The names of Shakyamuni, Tensho Daijin (Sun Goddess), the Four Great Bodhisattvas[[14]](#footnote-14) (Jōgyō, Muhengyō, Jyōgyō, and Anryugyō), etc. who surround the Law are not to be worshipped. Instead, like them, have Namumyōhōrengekyō at the center your mind. There is no meaning or value in worshipping the individual names surrounding the Law. That is not what you are supposed to worship. The only thing you should worship and pray to is Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Question: Why does Nichiren say in the gosho that he reported to the gods and Buddhas that he received articles of clothing etc. from believers?

**RH:** To use a metaphor, if Buddha is a doctor, god is a nurse. A god is an entity that supports or helps a Buddha. As I mentioned, all existence surrounds the Law that is in the center of Gohonzon, and they are all equal. When Nichiren Daishonin was offered clothing or food from believers, he always placed these items in front of Gohonzon and expressed his gratitude. He did not deny the existence of gods who are the helpers of the Buddha. He didn’t judge which was superior and which inferior. He considered every existence, including gods, as having meaning and purpose.

The role of the gods is to support Buddha. Gods are not the ones in charge. Gods do not initiate or create anything. The only reason for their existence is to protect and support Buddha. There is a Japanese proverb that goes, “God lives in an honest heart.” This means an honest person having the right Law will be protected by gods. Gods will only protect what is right; gods will never protect what is wrong. Gods cannot initiate an act on their own. If something is wrong or evil, the gods will ignore or abandon it. The True Law is the center of everything—good or bad. And only a Buddha can teach the True Law. A god cannot teach the Law.

**Question:** Is the world then doomed? Nowadays there is so much evil, ignorance and confusion in the world. It doesn’t appear the gods are protecting this world.

**RH:** That is absolutely correct.

It’s because the gods are starving. The food or nourishment for the gods is the correct Law. If the world is filled with bad and evil deeds, bad thinking, and bad beliefs the gods are starving. Only the good, True Law can nourishment and activate them. When they are not being nourished with the Law, they abandon this world and return to where they originated from—somewhere else beyond this world. So, when the gods abandon this world where we are, evil and bad things replace them and the world declines.

In the world, there are good gods and bad gods[[15]](#footnote-15). In Japan, there are shrines where it is said the gods live. Once the good gods leave these shrines because they aren’t being fed with the good Law, bad gods or demons take over the shrines. When people go to the shrines to worship, seeking protection from the gods, they are instead attacked by the bad gods who wreak havoc in their lives, and make their situations much worse. Good gods have no power to create anything. All they can do is protect people who do good things, which is to correctly practice the True Law, and they will abandon those who do bad things. That is the function of gods.

The Lotus Sutra consists of 28 chapters. In the first chapter titled “Introductory,” Shakyamuni acknowledges the existence of gods. In the very first paragraph among all the beings in attendance at Eagle Peak who are gathered to hear the preaching of the Lotus Sutra are gods or deities from worlds in all directions of the universe. First, they appeared because they realized that the Lotus Sutra was completely different from all prior teachings, and that all kinds of obstacles would emerge to obstruct the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. So where ever the Lotus Sutra is being preached, no matter where it is in the universe, the gods will appear to protect and assure that it will be taught. Secondly, they vowed to protect the believers who practice the Lotus Sutra correctly, no matter what. These two functions of the gods are described in the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

**The Law that was Revealed**

**by Nichiren Daishonin[[16]](#footnote-16)**

**Reverend Raidō Hirota**

**Sanbo-in Temple**

**August 2018**

The lives of all living things in the universe are not governed, owned or created by God, Buddha, or any special existence. Because life goes through the phases of birth, aging, illness and death it appears as though life is finite—that there is a beginning and an end. But the truth about time is that the past is eternal, and the future is eternal. There is neither beginning nor end. There is only permanent eternity. Not only is time eternal, but the universe is also everlasting, infinite, ever-expanding and increasing in volume.

All life is connected. If we equate all life to the great ocean, then our single life is like a droplet of water that has been extracted from the great ocean of life. Yet, even though it is a single drop, this one droplet has all the elements and ingredients contained in the greater life ocean. When this single life completes the course of birth, aging, illness and death, it returns, connects with all life and merges into the original ocean. There is no beginning or end to the life cycle of birth, aging, illness and death of the great ocean. It is permanent and non-discriminating. Moreover, there is no fixed reincarnation. That is, person A will not be reborn as person A. Person B will not be reborn as person B. Person C will not be reborn as person C. A single life emerges from all life. Thus, a single life is supported by all life, supports all life, and all life is connected to Buddha’s life.

All life is equal with no discrimination by rank. All life can become a Buddha or attain Buddhahood by believing and practicing this Law. The freedom and equality that is based on this Law is not the freedom and equality based on human rights. It is absolute freedom and equality based on Buddha’s rights.

There is a cause or reason for all this. The cause is the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. This Law was first revealed by Nichiren Daishonin. Since this Law reveals that all life possesses the life of Buddha, to deny or discriminate based on creed, ethnicity, sex, social status, financial standing, and position in life would be inconsistent and a denial of the Law. Therefore, discrimination of any kind is not tolerated. For this reason, this Law is the only way to realize true freedom, true equality and peace in this world.

Human beings cannot live autonomously. Life cannot be sustained without water, air and all other life. If it is believed that because human beings were made in the image of God, and are therefore the most precious of all life, can it then be said that animals are inferior because they were born to be eaten by humans?

The True Law is true because it transcends the difference in time between past and future, and between nations, ethnic groups, and cultural civilizations. This Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō revealed by Nichiren Daishonin is the Law of eternity without beginning or end for all living beings (a concept called *kuon ganjo*); True Cause, which is the Law—the original cause—that enables all Buddhas to attain enlightenment (a concept referred to as *honnin’myo*); and three thousand realms, including the life of Buddha, contained within each, single life (the concept known as *ichinen sanzen*).

There are many religions in the world. Most have objects of worship that resemble human form. In Buddhism, there are statues of Buddhas and saints such as Shakyamuni Buddha, Amida Buddha[[17]](#footnote-17), Dainichi Buddha[[18]](#footnote-18), Bodhisattavas Kannon[[19]](#footnote-19) and Maitreya[[20]](#footnote-20); in Christianity, there are statues of Christ, Mary and other saints, as well as the cross. But only Nichiren Daishonin created an object of worship (*Gohonzon*) that represents the abstract Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Since it was the mission and responsibility of Shakyamuni Buddha to lead all living beings to Buddhism, Nichiren Daishonin respects Shakyamuni Buddha. However, originally Shakyamuni was an ordinary human being like us, who practiced in a mundane world, became enlightened to the Law and as a result became a Buddha. We do not worship Shakyamuni as an object of worship. For, if we worship a person and not the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, we cannot become Buddha as Shakyamuni Buddha had achieved. The Buddha worshipped the Law and became a Buddha. So, no matter how much you worship the Buddha, it is impossible to awaken the Buddha nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō that is in your life. Therefore, in the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, only the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō is the object or worship.

To ask the Buddha to save you, protect you, help you, cure you of sickness, gain fame and fortune, and make your troubles disappear is not a true religion. A true religion does not sacrifice faith for all manner of benefits in this present world. With a true faith, you gain a true way of life, a real peace of mind, aspire to live a life of Buddha, even a little, and feel the life of Buddha that lives in your life, and in all other lives.



**GOSHO SELECTION**

***Excerpt***

**Questions and Answers on Embracing the Lotus Sutra[[21]](#footnote-21)**

Question: I have been born a human being--something rarely achieved--and have had the good fortune to encounter Buddhism. But there are shallow teachings and there are profound teachings, and some people rank high in capacity while others rank low. Now what teachings ought I to practice in order to attain Buddhahood as quickly as possible? I beg you to instruct me on this point.

Answer: Each family has its respected elders, and each province, its men of honored station. But although people all look up to their particular lord and pay honor to their own parents, could anyone stand higher than the ruler of the nation?

In the same way, confrontations between the Mahayana and the Hinayana or between the provisional and true teachings are comparable to disputes among rival houses, but among all the sutras expounded during the lifetime of the Buddha, the Lotus Sutra alone holds the position of absolute superiority. It is the guidepost that points the way to the immediate attainment of perfect wisdom, the carriage that takes us at once to the place of enlightenment.

Question: As I understand it, a teacher is someone who has grasped the central meaning of the sutras and treatises and who writes commentaries explaining them. If that is so, then it is only natural that the teachers of the various sects should each formulate doctrines according to his understanding, and on that basis write his commentaries, establish principles, and dedicate himself to the attainment of perfect wisdom. How could such an undertaking be in vain? To insist that the Lotus Sutra alone holds the position of absolute superiority is to adopt too narrow a view, I believe.

Answer: If you think that to proclaim the absolute superiority of the Lotus Sutra is to take too narrow a view, then one would have to conclude that no one in the world was more narrow-minded than Shakyamuni Buddha. I am afraid you are greatly mistaken in this matter. Let me quote to you from one of the sutras and one of the schools of commentary and see if I can resolve your confusion.

The Muryogi Sutra says: "[Because people differ in their natures and desires,] I expounded the Law in various ways. Expounding the Law in various ways, I made use of the power of expedient means. But in these more than forty years, I have not yet revealed the truth."

Hearing this pronouncement, Bodhisattva Daishogon[[22]](#footnote-22) and the other eighty thousand bodhisattvas replied in unison, voicing their understanding that "[If one cannot hear of this sutra...] in the end he will never attain supreme enlightenment, even after the lapse of countless, limitless, inconceivable asogi[[23]](#footnote-23) kalpas."

The point of this passage is to make clear that, no matter how much one may aspire to the Buddha Way by calling upon the name of Amida Buddha or by embracing the teachings of the Zen sect--relying on the sutras of the Kegon, Agon, Hodo and Hannya periods preached by the Buddha during the previous forty years and more--he will never succeed in attaining supreme enlightenment, even though a countless, limitless, inconceivable number of asogi kalpas should pass.

And this is not the only passage of this type. The Hoben chapter of the Lotus Sutra states: "The World-Honored One has long expounded his doctrines and now must reveal the truth." It also says, "[In the Buddha lands of the ten directions,] there is the Dharma of only one vehicle. There are not two, nor are there three." These passages mean that only this Lotus Sutra represents the truth.

. . . .

It also says, "One who refuses to take faith in this sutra and instead slanders it immediately destroys the seeds for becoming a Buddha in this world.... After they die, they will fall into the Avichi Hell."[[24]](#footnote-24)

Examining these passages, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai concluded that it was statements such as these that had prompted the words, "Is this not a devil who has taken on the Buddha's form?"[[25]](#footnote-25) If we merely rely upon the commentaries of the various teachers, and do not follow the statements of the Buddha himself, then how can we call our beliefs Buddhism? To do so would be the height of absurdity!

. . . .

It is the way of the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra to say nothing concerning the sutras that were to be preached in the future. Only in the case of the Lotus Sutra, because it is the ultimate and highest statement of the Buddha's teachings, do we find a clear pronouncement that this sutra alone holds the place of absolute superiority among "all the sutras I have preached, now preach, and will preach."

Hence Miao-lo's commentary states: "Only when he came to preach the Lotus Sutra did the Buddha explain that his earlier teachings were provisional, and make clear that his present teaching in the Lotus Sutra represents the truth."[[26]](#footnote-26) Thus we may see that, in the Lotus Sutra, the Tathagata gave definite form both to his true intention and to the methods to be used in teaching and conferring benefit.

. . . .

Now, if you wish to attain Buddhahood, you have only to lower the banners of your arrogance, cast aside the staff of your anger, and devote yourself exclusively to the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra. Worldly fame and profit are mere baubles of your present existence, and arrogance and prejudice are ties that will fetter you in a future one. Ah, you should be ashamed of them! And you should fear them, too!

Question: Since, by means of a single instance, one may surmise the nature of all, on hearing your brief remarks about the Lotus Sutra, I feel that my ears and eyes have been clearly opened for the first time. But how can one understand the Lotus Sutra, so as to quickly reach the shore of enlightenment?

I have heard it said that only one for whom the sun of wisdom shines unclouded in the great sky of ichinen sanzen, and for whom the water of wisdom in the broad pond of *isshin sangan[[27]](#footnote-27)* is clear and never muddied, has the capacity to carry out the practice of this sutra. But I have never exerted myself to study the various schools. . . .

It would seem, therefore, that my capacity is not equal to the Lotus Sutra. What am I to do?

Answer: It is the way of scholars these days to assert that only those who possess superior wisdom and strenuously exert themselves in the practice of meditation have the capacity to benefit from the Lotus Sutra, and to discourage persons who lack wisdom from even trying. But this is in fact an utterly ignorant and erroneous view. The Lotus Sutra teaches that all people, whoever they may be, can attain the Buddha Way. Therefore, the persons of superior faculties and superior capacity should naturally devote themselves to meditating on the mind and the dharmas. But for persons of inferior faculties and inferior capacity, the important thing is simply to have a mind of faith. Hence the Lotus Sutra states: "Those who with a pure mind believe and revere this doctrine, without giving way to doubt or confusion, will not fall into the realm of Hell, Hunger or Animality, but will be reborn in the presence of the Buddhas of the ten directions."[[28]](#footnote-28) One should have complete faith in the Lotus Sutra and look forward to being reborn in the presence of the Buddhas.

To illustrate, suppose that a person is standing at the foot of a tall embankment and is unable to ascend. And suppose that there is someone on top of the embankment who lowers a rope and says, "If you take hold of this rope, I will pull you up to the top of the embankment." If the person at the bottom begins to doubt that the other has the strength to pull him up, or wonders if the rope is not too weak and therefore refuses to put forth his hand and grasp it, then how is he ever to get to the top of the embankment? But if he follows the instructions, puts out his hand and takes hold of the rope, then he can climb up.

If one doubts the strength of the Buddha when he says, "I alone can save them"; if one is suspicious of the rope held out by the Lotus Sutra when its teachings declare that one can "gain entrance through faith"[[29]](#footnote-29); if one fails to chant the Mystic Law which guarantees that "[concerning this man's attainment of Buddhahood,] there can assuredly be no doubt,"[[30]](#footnote-30) then the Buddha's power cannot reach him and it will be impossible for him to scale the embankment of enlightenment.

Lack of faith is the basic failing that causes one to fall into hell. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra states: "One who gives way to doubt and does not have faith will surely fall into the evil paths."[[31]](#footnote-31)

When one has had the rare good fortune to be born a human being, and the further good fortune to encounter the teachings of Buddhism, how can he waste this opportunity? If one is going to take faith at all, then among all the various teachings of the Mahayana and the Hinayana, provisional and true doctrines, he should take faith in the one vehicle, the true purpose for which the Buddhas come into this world and the direct path to attaining enlightenment for all living beings.

If the sutra that one embraces is superior to all other sutras, then the person who can uphold its teachings must likewise surpass other people. That is why the Lotus Sutra states: "He who can uphold this sutra will also be first among all the multitude of living beings."[[32]](#footnote-32) There can be no question about these golden words of the great sage, the Buddha. And yet people fail to understand this principle or to examine the matter, but instead seek worldly reputation or give way to suspicion and prejudice, thus forming the basis for falling into hell.

All that is desired is that one embrace this sutra and cast his name upon the sea of the vows made by the Buddhas of the ten directions, that he entrust his honor to the heaven that is the compassion of the bodhisattvas of the three existences. When a person thus embraces the Lotus Sutra, he will cause the gods, dragons, and the others of the eight kinds of lowly beings,[[33]](#footnote-33) as well as all the great bodhisattvas, to become his followers. Not only that, but his physical body, which is still in the course of achieving Buddhahood, will acquire the Buddha eye[[34]](#footnote-34) of one who has perfected that course; and this common flesh, that exists in the realm of the conditioned, will put on the holy garments of the unconditioned. Then he need never fear the three paths[[35]](#footnote-35) or tremble before the eight difficulties.[[36]](#footnote-36) He will ascend to the peak of the mountain of the seven

expedients[[37]](#footnote-37) and sweep away the clouds of the nine worlds. In the garden of undefiled ground the flowers will bloom, and in the sky of the Dharma nature the moon will shine brightly. One can rely on the passage that promises, "Concerning this man's attainment of Buddhahood, there can assuredly be no doubt," and there is no question about the Buddha's pronouncement that "I alone can save them."

The blessings gained by arousing even a single moment of faith in and understanding of the Lotus Sutra surpass those of practicing the five paramitas[[38]](#footnote-38); and the benefit enjoyed by the fiftieth person who rejoices on hearing the Law is greater than that acquired by giving alms for eighty years.[[39]](#footnote-39) The doctrine of the immediate attainment of enlightenment far outshines the doctrines of other scriptures; and the pronouncements concerning the revelation of the Buddha's original enlightenment and the immeasurable duration of his life as the Buddha are never found in any of the other teachings.

Thus it was that the eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king was able to come out of the vast sea and in an instant give proof of the power of this sutra, and Bodhisattva Jōgyō of the essential teaching emerged from beneath the great earth and demonstrated the unfathomably long life span of the Buddha. This, the Lotus, is the king of sutras, defying description in words, the wonderful Law that is beyond the mind's power to comprehend.

To ignore the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra and to assert that other sutras stand on a par with it is to commit the worst possible slander of the Law, a major offense of the utmost gravity. No analogy could suffice to illustrate it. The Buddhas, for all their powers of magical transformation, could never finish describing its consequences, and the bodhisattvas, with all the wisdom at their command, could not fathom its immensity. Thus, the Hiyu chapter of the Lotus Sutra says: "Not even an aeon would be time enough to explain the full gravity of this sin." This passage means that if one were to describe the offense of a person who acts against the Lotus Sutra even once, he could exhaust a whole kalpa and never finish describing its seriousness.

For this reason, someone who commits this offense will never be able to hear the teaching of the Buddhas of the three existences, and will be cut off from the doctrines of the Tathagatas, who are as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. Such a person will move from darkness into greater darkness. How could he escape the pains and sufferings of the great citadel of the Avichi Hell? Could any person of feeling fail to dread the prospect of lengthy kalpas of woe?

Thus the Lotus Sutra states: "They will despise, hate, envy and bear grudges against those who read, recite, transcribe and embrace this sutra.... After they die, they will fall into the Avichi Hell." Who could help but tremble before these golden words of the great sage? And who could doubt the clear-cut pronouncement of the Buddha when he said, "Honestly discarding the provisional teachings, [I will expound only the

supreme Way]"[[40]](#footnote-40)?

However, people all turn their backs on these sutra passages, and the world as a whole is completely confused with regard to the principles of Buddhism. Why do you persist in following the teachings of evil friends? The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai in his commentary has said that to accept and to put faith in the doctrines of evil teachers is the same as drinking poison.[[41]](#footnote-41) You must beware of this! You must beware indeed!

Taking a careful look at the world today, we see that, although people declare that the Law is worthy of respect, they all express hatred for the person [who champions it]. You yourself seem to be very much confused as to the source from which the Law springs. Just as all the different kinds of plants and trees come forth from the earth, so all the various teachings of the Buddha are spread by persons. As the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai has said, "Even during the Buddha's lifetime, the Law was revealed by people. How, then, in the latter age, can one say that the Law is worthy of respect but that the person [who champions it] is to be despised?"[[42]](#footnote-42)

Hence, if the Law that one embraces is supreme, then the person who embraces it must accordingly be foremost among all others. And if that is so, then to speak ill of that person is to speak ill of the Law, just as to show contempt for the son is to show contempt for the parents who bore him.

You should realize from this that the people of today speak words that in no way match what is in their hearts. It is as though they were to beat their parents with a copy of the Classic of Filial Piety.[[43]](#footnote-43) When they know that, unseen by others, the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are observing them, how can they fall to be ashamed of such actions! The pains of hell are frightful indeed. Beware of them! Beware of them!

When you look at those of superior capacity, do not disparage yourself. The Buddha's true intention was that no one, even those of inferior capacity, be denied enlightenment. Conversely, when you compare yourself with persons of inferior capacity, do not be arrogant and overproud. Even persons of superior capacity may be excluded from enlightenment if they do not devote themselves wholeheartedly.

One may think fondly of his native village, but, as he pays no visit there and no particular reason to go presents itself, in time he gives up the idea of returning. Or one may pine for a particular person, but, with no hope of winning that person's love and having exchanged no vows, he abandons the thought of continuing to wait. So in like manner we neglect to journey to the pure land of Eagle Peak, though it surpasses in grandeur the palaces of nobles and high ministers, and moreover is quite easy to reach. We fail to behold the gentle and benign figure of the Buddha, who has declared, "I am your father,"[[44]](#footnote-44) though we ought surely to present ourselves before him. Should not one grieve at this, until his sleeves are drenched with tears and his heart consumed by regret?

The color of the clouds in the sky as twilight falls, the waning light of the moon when dawn is breaking--these things make us ponder. In the same way, whenever events remind us of life's uncertainty, we should fix our thoughts on the existence to come. When we view the blossoms of spring or the snow on a winter morning, we should think of it, and even on evenings when winds bluster and gathering clouds tumble across the sky, we should not forget it even for an instant.

Life lasts no longer than the interval between the drawing of one breath and the exhaling of another. At what time, what moment, should we ever allow ourselves to forget the compassionate vow of the Buddha, whose "constant thought"[[45]](#footnote-45) is of our salvation? On what day or month should we permit ourselves to be without the sutra that says, "[Among those who hear of this Law,] there is not one who shall not attain Buddhahood"[[46]](#footnote-46)?

How long can we expect to live on as we have, from yesterday to today or from last year to this year? We may look back over our past and count how many years we have accumulated, but who can for certain number himself among the living for another day or even for an hour? Yet, though one may know that the moment of his death is already at hand, he clings to his arrogance and prejudice, his worldly fame and profit, and fails to devote himself to chanting the Mystic Law. Such an attitude is futile

beyond description! Even though the Lotus Sutra is called the teaching by which all can attain the Buddha Way, how could a person such as this actually attain it? It is said that even the moonlight will not deign to shine on the sleeve of an unfeeling person.

Moreover, as life does not go beyond the moment, the Buddha expounded the blessings that come from a single moment of rejoicing [on hearing the Lotus Sutra]. If two or three moments were required, this could no longer be called the original vow of the Buddha of great undifferentiating wisdom, the single vehicle of the teaching of immediate enlightenment that enables all beings to attain Buddhahood.

As for the time of its propagation, the Lotus Sutra spreads during the latter age, when the Buddha's Law disappears. As for what capacity of persons it is suited to, it can save even those who commit the five cardinal sins or who slander the Law. Therefore, you must be guided by the intent of [the Lotus Sutra, which is] the immediate attainment of enlightenment and never give yourself up to the mistaken views suggested to you by doubts or attachments,

How long does a lifetime last? If one stops to consider, it is like a single night's lodging at a wayside inn. Should one forget that fact and seek some measure of worldly fame and profit? Though you may gain them, they will be mere prosperity in a dream, a delight scarcely to be prized. You would do better simply to leave such matters to the karma formed in your previous existences.

Once you awaken to the uncertainty and transience of this world, you will find endless examples confronting your eyes and filling your ears. Vanished like clouds or rain, the people of past ages have left nothing but their names. Fading away like dew, drifting far off like smoke, our friends of today too disappear from sight. And should one suppose that he alone can somehow remain forever like the clouds over Mount Mikasa?[[47]](#footnote-47) The spring blossoms depart with the wind; the maple leaves turn red in the

autumn showers. All are proof that no living being can stay for long in this world. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra counsels us: "Nothing in this world is firm or secure; all is like foam on the water or a wisp of flame."[[48]](#footnote-48)

"[This is my constant thought:] how I can cause all living beings to gain entry to the highest Way.”[[49]](#footnote-49) These words express the Buddha's deepest wish to enable both those who accept the True Law and those who oppose it to attain Buddhahood. Because this is his ultimate purpose, those who embrace the Lotus Sutra for even a short while are acting in accordance with his will. And if one acts in accordance with the Buddha's

will, he will be repaying the debt of gratitude he owes to the Buddha. The words of the sutra, that are as full of compassion as a mother's love, will then find solace, and the cares of the Buddha, who said, "I alone can save them," will likewise be eased. Not only will Shakyamuni Buddha rejoice, but, because the Lotus Sutra is the ultimate purpose for the advent of all Buddhas, the Buddhas of the ten directions and the three existences will likewise rejoice. "[One who embraces it even for a short time] will delight me and all other Buddhas,"[[50]](#footnote-50) said Shakyamuni. And not only will the Buddhas rejoice, but the gods also will join in their delight. Thus, when the Great Teacher Dengyo lectured on the Lotus Sutra, the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman presented him with a purple robe,[[51]](#footnote-51) and when the priest Kuya[[52]](#footnote-52) recited the Lotus Sutra, the great deity of Matsuo Shrine was able to gain protection from the cold wind.

For this reason, when praying that "the seven difficulties vanish, the seven blessings at once appear,"[[53]](#footnote-53) this sutra, the Lotus, is the most effective of all. That is because it promises that one "will enjoy peace and security in this life."[[54]](#footnote-54) And when offering prayers to avert the disasters of foreign invasion and internal revolt, nothing can surpass this wonderful sutra, because it promises that persons who embrace it will be protected "for as far as a hundred yojana[[55]](#footnote-55) away, so that they shall suffer no decline or distress."[[56]](#footnote-56)

But the method of offering prayers in our present age is the exact opposite of what it ought to be. Prayers are based upon the provisional teachings, which were intended for propagation in previous ages, rather than upon the secret Law of the highest truth, which is intended for propagation in the latter age. To proceed in this way is like trying to make use of last year's calendar, or to employ a crow for the kind of fishing that only a cormorant can do.

This situation has come about solely because the error-bound teachers of the provisional teachings are accorded high honor, while the teacher enlightened to the true teaching has not been duly recognized. How sad to think that this rough gem, such as was presented by Pien Ho[[57]](#footnote-57) to kings Wen and Wu, should find no place of acceptance! How joyful, though, that I have obtained in this life the priceless gem concealed in the

topknot of the wheel-turning king,[[58]](#footnote-58) for which Shakyamuni made his advent in this world!

What I am saying here has been fully attested to by the Buddhas of the ten directions and is no mere idle talk. Therefore, knowing that the Lotus Sutra says, "In the world at that time the people will be full of hostility, and it will be extremely difficult to believe,"[[59]](#footnote-59) how can you retain even a trace of disbelief and refuse to become a Buddha, of which promise "there can assuredly be no doubt"?

Up until now you have merely suffered in vain the pains of countless existences since the remotest past. Why do you not, if only this once, try planting the mystic seeds that lead to eternal and unchanging enlightenment? Though at present you may taste only a tiny fraction of the everlasting joys that await you in the future, surely you should not spend your time thoughtlessly coveting worldly fame and profit, which are as fleeting as a bolt of lightning or the morning dew. As the Tathagata has taught us, "There is no safety in this threefold world; it is like a burning house."[[60]](#footnote-60) And in the words of a bodhisattva, "All things are like a phantom, like a magically conjured image."[[61]](#footnote-61)

Outside the city of Tranquil Light, everywhere is a realm of suffering. Once you leave the haven of inherent enlightenment, what is there that can bring you joy? I pray you will embrace the Mystic Law, which guarantees that one "will enjoy peace and security in this life and good circumstances in the next."[[62]](#footnote-62) This is the only glory that you need seek in your present lifetime, and is the action that will draw you toward Buddhahood in your next existence. Single-mindedly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and urge others to do the same; that will remain as the only memory of your present life in this human world. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Nichiren

March, 1263



1. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ōdaimoku - Ō=venerable. Daimoku is the title of a sutra; Ōdaimoku is the invocation of the venerable title of the Lotus Sutra or Namumyōhōrengekyō. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Nichiren Daishonin - (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all livings beings can become enlightened. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The Law – Namumyōhōrengekyō- the Mystic Law, which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Nichiren Shoshu - the sect of Buddhism that embraces and recites the true Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō as the original cause of enlightenment and believes in Nichiren Daishonin of the true Buddha. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gohonzon - the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which represents the universal Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and the Buddha nature in all things. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyō - from Chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra: “I respect everyone deeply, I do not despise anyone, not even a little, or look down upon anyone with contempt, because everyone has the ability to become a Buddha of Namumyōhōrengekyō, if they believer in Namumyōhōrengekyō and practice.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Eagle Peak – sometimes called Vulture Peak, it is a mountain outside the city of Rajagriha where it is said Shakyamuni Buddha preached the Lotus Sutra. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 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. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Sun Goddess – Tensho Daijin, a Japanese mythology figure who was later adopted as a protective god in Buddhism who protects the prosperity of believers of the True Law. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Hachiman – a Japanese mythology figure who was later adopted as a protective god in Buddhism who protects the land of believers in the True Law. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ten Demon Daughters – or ten goddesses who pledge in chapter 26 of the Lotus Sutra to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Shakyamuni - Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE-949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism on this earth. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Four Great Bodhisattvas - Jōgyō, Muhengyō, Jyōgyō and Anryugyō signify the four virtues of the Buddha’s life: true self, eternity, purity, and happiness, which in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, are viewed as collectively indicating the life of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Good gods and bad gods – Bonten and Taishaku, two tutelary gods, are among the good gods. The Devil of the Sixth Heaven who robs life, would be among the bad gods or devils. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. This article appears on the homepage of Udumbarafoundation.org and is the translation of the Japanese article that is on the homepage of Sanbo-in temple. It is also translated into Italian, and can be accessed from udumbarafoundation.org. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Amida Buddha - Infinite Life or Infinite Light Buddha who is said to reside in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the Western region of the universe. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Dainichi Buddha - a Buddha of the esoteric teachings who, it is said, is always in this world teaching the law. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Bodhisattva Kannon – also Kanzeon – a bodhisattva who pledged to assume 32 different forms and appear anywhere in the wold to save people from danger or suffering. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Maitreyia – Jap. Miroku – a bodhisattva who is predicted to succeed Shakyamuni in this world some 5,670 million years after Shakyamuni’s death. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*¸Vol. 5, p.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Daishogon: A bodhisattva representing the assembly who listened to Shakyamuni Buddha preach the Muryogi Sutra, an introductory teaching to Lotus Sutra, on Eagle Peak. The Buddha entrusted the sutra to him and the other eighty thousand bodhisattvas present, who then vowed to propagate it. The figure eighty thousand is not intended to be taken literally but simply indicates a large number. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Asogi: "Innumerable." An ancient Indian numerical unit, indicating an uncountably large number. According to the Kusha Ron, however, it is calculable and represents 1059. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid. This quotation expresses Shariputra's feelings of doubt when he first heard the teaching of the one vehicle as expressed in the Hoben (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. T'ien-t'ai's statement appears in the Hokke Mongu, vol. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Hokke Gengi Shakusen, vol. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Isshin sangan: "Threefold contemplation in a single mind." A form of meditation set forth by T'ien-t'ai in the Maka Shikan for perceiving the unification of the three truths of non-substantiality, temporary existence and the Middle Way in a single moment of life. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Lotus Sutra, chap. 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid, chap. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Ibid, chap. 21 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid. chap. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Lotus Sutra, chap. 23. The Daishonin slightly abbreviates the wording of the sutra. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Eight kinds of lowly beings: Nonhuman beings who protect Buddhism, mentioned in the Hiyu (3rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. They are gods; dragons; a kind of demon called yakshas; gods of music called gandharvas; demons called asuras, said to live at the bottom of the sea; garudas, or birds that prey on dragons; kimnaras, or gods with beautiful voices; and mahoragas, who are gods shaped like snakes. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Buddha eye: One of the five types of vision. The Buddha eye penetrates the true nature of life spanning past, present and future. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Three paths: Here, the path of fire, the path of blood, and the path of swords. Roads which the dead are said to travel. The term is used synonymously with the three evil paths of Hell, Animality and Hunger, and represents the sufferings which the deceased must undergo in retribution for the evil karma they created while alive. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Eight difficulties: Eight places, states or circumstances wherein one is unable to see the Buddha or to listen to the Buddha's teaching. They are the realms of Hell, Hunger, and Animality; the heaven of long life, a division within the fourth meditation heaven in the world of form; Uttarakuru, the continent north of Mt. Sumeru whose people experience manypleasures; obstruction of the sense organs; prejudice or false views arising from attachment to secular knowledge; and the period before the Buddha's birth or after his death. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Seven expedients: The provisional status attained by those of Humanity; Heaven; Learning; Realization: bodhisattvas of the Tripitaka, or Hinayana, teaching; bodhisattvas of the connecting, or introductory Mahayana, teaching; and bodhisattvas of the specific, or higher provisional Mahayana, teaching. They are mentioned in Miao-lo's Hokke Gengi Shakusen as a concept formulated by T'ien-t'ai on the basis of the Yakusoyu (5th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Five paramitas: The first five of the six paramitas, or practices required of Mahayana bodhisattvas in order to attain Buddhahood. According to the Fumbetsu Kudoku (17th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, to arouse even a single moment of belief and understanding on hearing the Lotus Sutra produces benefit surpassing that of practicing the five paramitas for eighty billion nayuta kalpas. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. This refers to the principle of continual propagation to the fiftieth person, mentioned in the Zuiki Kudoku (18th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Suppose, Shakyamuni says, that after the Buddha's death a person rejoices upon hearing the Lotus Sutra and preaches it to a second person, who in turn preaches it to a third, and so on, until the fiftieth person hears the sutra. Shakyamuni explains that the benefit even this fiftieth person receives by rejoicing upon hearing the sutra surpasses that gained by someone who offers alms for eighty years to the beings of four hundred billion asogi worlds, and also enables them to attain the state of arhat. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Hokke Mongu, chap. 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Probably a quote not from T'ien-t'ai but from Miao-lo, in the Hokke Mongu Ki, vol. 4, where he comments on T'ien-t'ai's interpretation of the Lotus Sutra passage: "Shariputra! You should believe this. The Buddha's teaching contains no falsehood." The Daishonin's wording differs only very slightly from Miao-lo's. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Classic of Filial Piety: (Chin Hsiao Ching) A work traditionally attributed to Tseng Tzu, a disciple of Confucius. Written in the form of a dialogue between Tseng Tzu and the master, it stresses filial piety as the cardinal virtue. It enjoyed special popularity under the Han-dynasty emperors (202 B.C. - A.D. 220). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Lotus Sutra, chap. 3. The text reads, "I tell you, Shariputra! All you people are my children, and I am your father." [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. This refers to the concluding verse from the Juryo (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which reads, "This is my constant thought: how I can cause all living beings to gain entry to the highest Way and quickly attain Buddhahood." [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Mikasa: A mountain located in Nara. A place of great scenic beauty, it often appears in traditional Japanese poetry. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Lotus Sutra, chap. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid., chap. 16. See footnote 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., chap. 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. According to the Dengyo Daishi Den (Biography of the Great Teacher Dengyo), in 814 Dengyo visited Usa Hachiman Shrine in Kyushu, where he lectured on the Lotus Sutra. The deity, much moved, is said to have personally presented Dengyo with a purple robe. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Kuya (903-972): A priest of the Heian period (794-1185) who worked to spread the Pure Land teachings among the common people. He traveled throughout various provinces, chanting the name of Amida Buddha while dancing in the streets. According to the Honcho Koso Den (Biographies of Eminent Priest of Japan), when Kuya stayed at Unrin-in temple in Kyoto, he saw an elderly man, shivering with cold, who announced himself to be the deity of Matsuo Shrine. Though the man had heard the Hannya sutras, he said, he had not yet been able to hear the Lotus Sutra; so he was still shivering in the wind of greed and delusion. Kuya recited the Lotus Sutra for his sake, whereupon the deity was relieved of his suffering. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. These words appear in the Ninno Sutra. The "seven difficulties" are (1) extraordinary changes of the sun and moon, (2) extraordinary changes of the stars and planets, (3) fires, (4) unseasonable floods, (5) storms, (6) drought and (7) war, including enemy attacks from without and rebellion from within. The "seven blessings" means averting or eradicating the seven difficulties. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Lotus Sutra, chap. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Yojana: A unit of measurement in ancient India, equal to the distance that the royal army was thought to march in a day. Approximations vary as widely as 9.6, 18 and 24 kilometers. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Lotus Sutra, chap. 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Pien Ho: A native of Ch'u in China during the Chou dynasty. According to the Ho-shih chapter of the Han Fei Tzu, Pien-Ho found a precious stone at Mt. Ch'u and presented it to King Li. When the king had it appraised, it was identified as a mere stone. So the king had Pien Ho's left foot cut off. After the king's death, Pien Ho again presented the precious stone, this time to King Wu, only to have his right foot Cut off on a second charge of deception. Later, after King Wen had ascended the throne, Pien Ho wept for three days at the foot of Mt. Ch'u, holding the precious stone, finally shedding tears of blood. Hearing of this, King Wen asked for Pien Ho's stone and had it polished. It was then recognized as being genuine and, in consequence, is said to have been widely revered by the general populace. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Wheel-turning king: An ideal ruler in Indian mythology. In Buddhism, wheel-turning kings ar those kings who rule the world by justice rather than force. They possess the thirty-two distinctive features and rule the four continents surrounding Mt. Sumeru by turning the wheel they received from heaven at the time of their coronation. These wheels are of four kinds: gold, silver, copper and iron. In the Anrakugyo (14th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the one Buddha vehicle is likened to a priceless gem concealed in the topknot of a wheel-turning king. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Lotus Sutra, chap. 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ibid., chap. 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Probably a reference to a similar passage in the Daichido Ron, vol. 37, discussing the non-substantiality of all phenomena. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Lotus Sutra, chap. 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)