

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

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## NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S *OMIESAMA* BUDDHA ENSHRINED AND CONSECRATED

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Even though I am not an experienced carver, after spending nearly two years on this project, I was able to complete the *Omiesama* (Honorable Buddha Statue or image created with the heart of faith) of Nichiren Daishonin. This was completed just in time to commemorate *Urabon*, the Buddhist memorial ceremony honoring the three treasures for the benefit of the deceased on August 13<sup>th</sup>. I would like all believers to visit the temple with the heart of faith.

If, since you became a believer in this religion, you have never seen an enshrined *Omiesama* (Honorable Buddha Statue) until now, you might feel perplexed, and may even misunderstand and distrust this statue on the altar, and view it as committing the slander<sup>1</sup> of idolatry. Therefore, I will explain some basic points so that you can properly understand for the benefit of your faith.

The origins of the *Omiesama* in Nichiren Shoshu<sup>2</sup> goes back to when Nichiren Daishonin was living in Minobu. Nippo, who was one of his disciples, carved an *Omiesama* of Nichiren Daishonin at the about 4 inches (10cm) in height, and smoked Nichiren Daishonin's shaved hair to make a powder. He then used the powder to color the clothes a light black, then showed the statue to his master. Nichiren smiled and said, "it looks like me." That is the story of how the *Omiesama* came about. It is called "first Buddha," and is now always placed next to the temple sanctuary Gohonzon.

After Nichiren Daishonin passed away, Nikko Shonin<sup>3</sup> eventually departed Mt. Minobu and settled near Mt. Fuji where he established Taisekiji Temple<sup>4</sup> and Omosu Seminary<sup>5</sup>. It was here that Nikko began calling the sage Nichiren "Daishonin," and "Buddhist Saint." He placed an *Omiesama* of Nichiren Daishonin holding an open scroll of the Lotus Sutra in the sacred area in front of where the Gohonzon is enshrined. One approaches the area in front of Gohonzon, which is called "Gohozen<sup>6</sup> for the Buddhist Saint," with reverence and the heart of faith. In this way, Nikko Shonin worshipped and served the Buddha as if Nichiren Daishonin was still alive. Therefore, it is since the time of Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin that an *Omiesama* of Nichiren Daishonin has been placed in front of the Gohonzon. This placement expresses *Namumyōhōrengekyō*<sup>7</sup>, *Nichiren Kaō*<sup>8</sup> 【南無妙法蓮華經 日蓮花押】 , which is what is written down the middle of Gohonzon. It further indicates that the appearance of the *Omiesama* represents the existence of *Ninpo-ikka* (oneness of the person and the Law). Nikko Shonin described it specifically, showing the modeling of its form in a way that is both appealing, as well as strongly and clearly delivering the message to believers and non-believers alike throughout the world to worship Nichiren Daishonin as the

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<sup>1</sup> Slander – attacking the teaching of the Buddha and neglecting the truth.

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

<sup>3</sup> Nikko Shonin – Byakuren Ajari Nikko Shonin (1246-1333) – 2<sup>nd</sup> High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who received the transfer of the teachings directly from Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>4</sup> Taisekiji - the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu.

<sup>5</sup> Omosu Seminary - established for prayer, training and ordination of disciples in the true and correct teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>6</sup> Gohozen – the sacred area in front of Gohonzon where the Honorable Buddha statue of Nichiren Daishonin is placed.

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

<sup>8</sup> *Kaō* – signature.

True Buddha (*Honbutsu*) of the Latter Day of the Law<sup>9</sup>.



The arrangement of placing the Honorable Buddha Statue of Nichiren Daishonin in front of Gohonzon is called the *Omidoshiki-Omido* style. This represents the time in which Nichiren Daishonin lived.

The arrangement of placing the Gohonzon in the middle and placing the Honorable Buddha Statue of Nichiren Daishonin facing left, and the Honorable Buddha Statue of Nikko Shonin facing right is called *Kyakuden* style. This represents the era after Nichiren Daishonin passed away. This style is also called *Sanbo* or “Three Treasures” style as the arrangement expresses the Buddha (Nichiren Daishonin), the Law (Gohonzon), and the priest (Nikko Shonin).

I am an absolute amateur. I haven’t studied the technique or art of knife carving, specifically, since I took a class in “technical machining” in middle school. I never imagined myself carving. But after the Shoshin-kai<sup>10</sup> split, and after the Shoshin-kai parishes<sup>11</sup> were combined and reorganized, I found myself in the same parish as

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<sup>9</sup> Mappo – The Latter Day of the Law – the age of decline of the Law; this present time period which began in 1052, about 2000 years after the death of Shakyamuni. It is called the evil age.

<sup>10</sup> Shoshin-kai - Shoshin-kai - Nichien Shoshu Shoshinkai – the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin’s true teachings.

<sup>11</sup> Shoshin-kai parishes – It was legally determined that Shoshinkai temples that were owned by Taiseikiji had to be returned to Taiseikiji when the priest who was head priest at the time of excommunication in 1982 passed away. In many, but not all instances, Shoshinkai priests who replaced the deceased chief priest of one of these temples decided that they wanted to continue to have a connection to Taiseikiji. Other Shoshinkai priests, who did not have a temple that was

Reverend Toyomichi Inoue of Jyoko-in Temple in Kagoshima, and began to get to know him during the Oeshiki Ceremony<sup>12</sup>. Jyoko-in had carved several *Omiesamas* in the past. I heard them speak about the difficulty of carving and heard several points about the process of the production, and learned several other things. I decided that I would challenge by myself, and start working at it a bit at a time beginning in August 2014.

Everything was new to me. I was in a fog. I started by carving a little bit at a time, and then studying several pictures of *Omiesamas*. I was surprised by how much I didn't know about how the human body was formed. I learned by touching my own body and face. At this point, I immediately hit a wall and couldn't move forward, because I just didn't know what I was doing. I felt I had recklessly begun something.

Then, on September 14, 2015, I injured my leg and was hospitalized for two months. At that time, I couldn't work on the *Omiesama* at all. Moreover, even after I was discharged from the hospital, and got off the crutches, I could only sit at my desk, and do my daily routine. I was anxious. All the while I wondered about what was going to happen to me. Would I eventually get better? Would I have to deal with this pain for the rest of my life? Would I have a disability as a result of this injury. And would I need another surgery? Then suddenly, I started to think about what Yuka, a girl who died on January 3, 2013 of a brain tumor at the age of 13, was thinking during her illness. I began thinking that I wanted to dedicate something to her. I asked myself, what could I do when I can't even move or sit up straight? I decided the best thing for me and for Yuka in my current condition would be to carve an *Omiesama*. So, for several months, I worked on carving a 2 inch (5cm) Honorable Buddha Statue with both hands joined together in prayer position.

While I was carving, I thought about Yuka deeply. Compared to Yuka, who lived throughout her life facing the great challenges of her situation, my current situation, which was filled with small anxieties and hesitations, was nowhere near comparable to Yuka's life experience. When I visited Yuka in the middle of her treatment, did Gongyo together, and heard her very confident and strong voice, I realized that Yuka was living with such determination even though she was young and less experienced in her life. I realized to believe is to be resolute. I was indecisive, and vacillated because I didn't have determination. I was not resolute.

The Law of the enlightenment of all living beings is explained by *Myōhō* alone. I can only be enlightened by this wonderful Law of *Myōhō*. We will all realize

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owned by Taisekiji, or who did not want to remain in a Taisekiji owned temple (which is about half the Shoshinkai), decided that they did not want to be affiliated with the slander of Taisekiji, so they incorporated in order to preserve the true teachings. This split took place about 5 years ago. The temples are organized in geographical or regional territories, called parishes. These parishes were rearranged after the split.

<sup>12</sup> Oeshiki ceremony - the memorial service for Nichiren Daishonin held on 13th day of the 10th month (October 13).

Buddhahood with this Law of *Myōhō*. These thoughts were a reawakening in which I suddenly felt the reality that life does not end with death. With that realization, a serenity came over me, and I became aware that it is possible that I was experiencing a trial within eternal existence. I wrote a brief letter to Yuka's family expressing what I was currently feeling, and told them I was attempting to carve an *Omiesama*. In their reply letter, quite unexpectedly they said, "please finish the *Omiesama* sometime in the future." I had almost given up, but with those words, I was encouraged to try the carving again. So, I started working every day, little by little, one stroke at a time.

In the past, there were Buddhist sculptors and some excellent carpenters among Nichiren Shoshu believers. But these days, I haven't heard of or seen any believers of Nichiren Shoshu who carved *Omiesama*. The Buddhist sculptor at the shop which sells Buddhist religious articles are not believers in the Law of Nichiren Daishonin. To make a livelihood, they make Shakyamuni Buddha, Amida Buddha, Bodhisattva Kannon, Yakushi Buddha, Dainichi Buddha, Bodhisattva Jizo, Fudō Myōō, and whatever else is easy, based on a prescribed form for Buddha and Bodhisattva statues. If I went and sat next to one of these sculptors from early morning to late at night, requesting them to make it this way or that way. . .no maybe I preferred it the other way, etc. until they finished my Buddhist statue, it would be very irritating, like having an itch that one cannot scratch. Even though this person has amazing skills, having to go back and forth like this, it would be impossible to complete the *Omiesama*. It is fine for persons of another religion to make the statue, if you pay for it and have a ceremony to consecrate the newly made Buddhist statue or image with an opening eye ceremony (*Kaigen kuyo*). But if you purchase and place in front of Gohonzon an *Omiesama* that was made with a feeling of impatience and irritation, it would not be an object towards which you would hold your hands in prayer. I believed an *Omiesama* carved by a person with a true heart and true faith in Nichiren Daishonin, even though his skills are primitive, would be the most reasonable in terms of faith. On the other hand, even though my skills may improve, if I make a sculpture of Shakyamuni Buddha, Amida Buddha, or Bodhisattva Kannon, that would be slander for I would be assaulting the teachings of Buddha, and abandoning the truth. I will, therefore, only make an *Omiesama* of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin, and no others.

While Nichiren Daishonin is the True Buddha of *Kuon Ganjo*<sup>13</sup> and *Honinmyo*<sup>14</sup>, (the original Buddha from time without beginning who has been enlightened by the original cause since the infinite past) in the age of *Mappō*, we never worship the *Omiesama* itself. Only when the *Omiesama* is enshrined with the Gohonzon of the Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds (*Jikkai gogu*) do we put our hands together in prayer and

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<sup>13</sup> Kuon ganjo – Kuon is the infinite past. Ganjo means the origin of everything beyond time and space

<sup>14</sup> Honinmyo – original cause- the cause for the Buddha's enlightenment.

respect it as an object of faith. The Gohonzon of Namumyōhōrengekyō is always the fundamental and essential object of faith.



The head of the Nichiren Daishonin *Omiesama* that I made is removable at the base of the neck. I removed the head, carved a hollow in the body and placed a *haragomori* Gohonzon<sup>15</sup> inside. *Omiesamas* that believers may have are around 4 inches (10cm) in height, and are therefore too small to house a *haragomori* Gohonzon, so a simplified Gohonzon is inscribed on the back of these *Omiesamas*. Whereas, the *Omiesama* I made measures 17 inches (43cm) wide, 11 inches (28cm) high, and 8 inches (20cm) deep. I could easily place an *okatagi* Gohonzon<sup>16</sup> inscribed by Nichikan Shonin<sup>17</sup> as a *haragomori* Gohonzon inside the body. This Gohonzon in the body of the *Omiesama*

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<sup>15</sup> Haragomori Gohonzon – literally translated as “embryo” Gohonzon. It is a miniature Gohonzon.

<sup>16</sup> Okatagi Gohonzon – a woodblock printed Gohonzon.

<sup>17</sup> Nichikan Shonin – 26<sup>th</sup> high priest

expresses that the life of all human beings equally possesses the Buddha-nature of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

The Nichiren Daishonin *Omiesama* made during the Kamakura era conformed to a prescribed form established in the Kamakura era as the Daishonin lived during that era. Out of respect for Nichiren Daishonin, the *Omiesamas* of the Kamakura era possessed the outstanding features of what was considered, during that time, the features of a great being, and not the features of an ordinary human being<sup>18</sup>:

1. Plump ears. Ears and ear lobes are extremely large and hanging long.
2. Nichiren Daishonin didn't have enough food but his traditional statues look as though his body has a large build, and he looks fat.
3. Nichiren Daishonin had a difficult life, and found it difficult to find clothing, but his traditional *Omiesama* are wearing a diamond collar.
4. The correct sitting posture during the Kamakura era was sitting cross-legged, so the statue is cross-legged.
5. During summer, from June to September, a fan is placed in the right hand which is holding the Sutra book.

The *Omiesama* of Nichiren Daishonin is dressed as though he were alive as follows:

- On October 1st place a cotton padded hat on the head, and remove it on April 1st.
- Place a scarf around the neck on September 12th and remove it on June 1st.
- Place a fan on June 1st and remove it on September 12th.

I couldn't confirm one particular feature of the head of other *Omiesamas* because there are only full frontal photographs of the face. But the Nichiren Daishonin *Omiesama* in the High Sanctuary at Taiseikiji has a vivid scar carved from the top of the head down to the middle of the left side of the head. This wound was incurred when Nichiren Daishonin was traveling on horseback at dusk on November 11, 1264 (in the first year of Bunei) when he was suddenly ambushed at Komatsubara by Tōjō Kagenobu, at the

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<sup>18</sup> The features of a great being – Shakyamuni was a human being who was enlightened, but out of admiration and respect for him over time his status grew until it was said that he possessed 32 outstanding features and 80 characteristics, totally 112 extraordinary attributes. Some of these attributes include: #14 golden skin. #15 emitting light from his body. #27 a large tongue that when he stuck it out could cover his entire face. #32 a tuft of hair between his eyebrows that curled into a ball and emitted light. His status became so great that he was an existence beyond reach.

age of 43. For the remainder of his life, that wound was very painful when it was cold, so the Daishonin took to wearing a cotton padded hat to reduce the pain and to try to heal the wound.



The statue of a person one respects tends to be made larger and more magnificent than the actual person, or perhaps it's the feeling of respect that makes a statue look more attractive. Therefore, it would make sense not to show a scar or bruise on a statue. However, Nichiren Daishonin taught that this way of thinking was not a good model for the enlightenment of all living beings, which was the greatest and highest purpose of Buddhism. He believed that this way of thinking would only bring despair to people who thought the status of a Buddha like Shakyamuni was beyond the reach or ability of all living beings to attain. Nichiren Daishonin taught that it was not a true Law or a true religion if it did not teach that all living beings like ourselves, who feel pain, itchiness, coldness, heat, sadness, loneliness, poverty, and emptiness, would be able to be enlightened. To believe that the Law which enlightened the Buddha is the Gohonzon, means that any human being, and all living things can be enlightened. That is the True Law and the true religion. A true religion is not a religion that worships a Buddha that is an existence unattainable and beyond the clouds, or makes Buddha, who preached



the Law, the object of worship. Nichiren Daishonin was a model of enlightenment, demonstrating to us that to live as a human being, living one's daily life as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, not having enough food to eat, nothing to wear, having your life threatened, being spat at, hit by rocks, and cursed and sworn at, this was the life of a Buddha. That is why, for this statue, the scar is an intentional symbol that precisely conveys the proof that Nichiren Daishonin lived as a believer of the Lotus Sutra. For this reason, I thought it would be better to carve the *Omiesama* as close to the Buddha as a common mortal<sup>19</sup> as I could:

1. I made normal ears,
2. A normal face, and a body that is not very stout.
3. My Nichiren Daishonin *Omiesama* is wearing the light gray robe that is worn daily, and a white *kesa* or surplice which is worn over the robe, and is divided into five sections longitudinally by four broad white strips. This tradition has carried on until this day. But I cannot imagine Nichiren wearing a diamond collar during daily life.
4. When you sit cross-legged, your chest will be clearly exposed, but every *Omiesama* has an unnatural appearance as the light gray robe covers the front, hiding the chest area. And the entire costume, top and bottom, is very off-balanced when a diamond collar kimono is worn without a men's formal pleated skirt (*hakama*) on the bottom. Even now, in this age, the attire is not formal dress; rather it is casual. So, I made Nichiren Daishonin wearing the same light gray bottom and top, with the white *kesa*.
5. In November, 1333, Third High Priest, Nichimoku Shonin<sup>20</sup> took sick and died at an inn in the mountains in Tarui in Mino Province when he was on his way to Kyoto to appeal to the emperor for the imperial court and the citizens of Japan to take faith in the Lotus Sutra, otherwise there would be no peace in the country. Accompanying him on this trip was Nichizon and Nichigō who were both disciples of Nikko Shonin. Upon Nichimoku's, death, both Nichizon and Nichigo continued to Kyoto and delivered Nichimoku Shonin's letter to the emperor as his representatives. Afterwards, Nichigō returned to Taisekiji with Nichimoku Shonin's remains. Nichizon remained in Kyoto, built Jōgyō-in temple in 1339, and worked hard to propagate the teachings. Later, in 1548, the name of the temple was changed to Yoboji.

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<sup>19</sup> Buddha as a common mortal – (Jp. Sokushin jobustu) attaining Buddhahood just as one is, without changing form.

<sup>20</sup> Nichimoku Shonin – Niidakyo Ajari Nichimoku (1260-1333) – 3<sup>rd</sup> High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who inherited the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin from Nikko Shonin.

During the time of the 14<sup>th</sup> high priest, Nisshu Shonin, Taisekiji became financially strapped. Thinking that the teachings were the same because they had the same origin, Nisshu Shonin thought to ask Yoboji for assistance as Yoboji was financially well off. In addition, without having the lines of communication that we have today, Taisekiji mistakenly believed that the teachings of Yoboji had remained as they were at the time Nichimoku Shonin's passed away. So, they invited a priest from Yoboji to be the 15<sup>th</sup> high priest of Taisekiji.

Nichiren Daishonin preached that the Law of the Namumyōhōrengekyō, which enlightened Shakyamuni, was the object of worship, and that was the teaching that Taisekiji followed. However, in the 280 years that ensued after Nichimoku Shonin's death, Yoboji had changed their teaching to worshiping Shakyamuni as the object of worship.

The priests of Taisekiji only used plain, light gray cloth for the clerical robe, and a white surplice or *kesa*. But because Yoboji was trying to compete with other religions in Kyoto, they began using fabric that had images and a twill weave. And for 90 years, from the 15<sup>th</sup> high priest Nisshō to the 23<sup>rd</sup> Nikkei that attire was imposed on Taisekiji. However, Taisekiji tried to resist, and tried diligently with believers to return to the Law of Nichiren Daishonin.

(I have been vocal in saying that we should not use clerical garments made of twill fabric with images, but I have been ignored, and there hasn't even been a discussion. I am very disappointed.)

Since the time we invited the priests of Yoboji to be high priests of Taisekiji, and even now, the priests are again departing from the real meaning of the clerical garment, which signifies the Law. They face the *Omiesama* and Gohonzon wearing *kesas* with images, and twill robes, and colored *sashinuki* (a type of *hakama* worn in ancient times) which indicates the priest's rank. How would they reply to Nichiren Daishonin if he asked them, "What kind of *kesa* is this, and what about this *sashinuki*?"

6. From the time of the Heian period (784-1185), aristocrats and noblemen, Shinto priests, and Samurai who were in service to the imperial court all wore the formal attire of colored *sashinuki* with a large wisteria crest when they appeared at the imperial court, But the *Omiesamas* of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin were not outfitted in that way. No one can explain, based on doctrine, why the current Nichiren Shoshu priests wear the large wisteria crest and colored *sashinuki* which not even the *Omiesamas* wear, and why they

wear different color *sashinuki* to identify their rank. I think it is wrong and false to call something you can't explain a clerical garment.

The difference between sitting in a cross-legged position and a straight-legged position is not a matter of doctrine; rather it was common courtesy, etiquette and the custom of the Kamakura era. I made my *Omiesama* with a formal top and bottom *hakama*-style outfit which doesn't expose the chest, and which conforms with our current customs.

I don't believe the style of the *kesa* surplice that Nichiren Daishonin wore during the Kamakura era was the same as what we currently wear. However, since it is impossible to precisely reproduce what was worn in the past, I decided not to use my imagination in making the *kesa*. Instead, I made the surplice in the style we priest are currently wearing.



7. All the *Omiesamas* I have observed had the fan in his right hand with it waving toward him while he is looking at the Sutra book. However, when I tried to create that, I found it impossible and unnatural to move the fan. So, I placed the fan on a fan holder stand on the tatami mat where Nichiren Daishonin can reach it at any time.
8. The scroll of the Lotus Sutra which Nichiren Daishonin is looking at is volume six. The Lotus Sutra is often called the 8-scroll Sutra. Volume six contains chapter 16, "Life of the Tathagata" (*Myōhōrengekyō Nyorai Juryo-hon dai jūroku*), chapter 17, "Discrimination of Merits" (*Myōhōrengekyō Fumbetsu Kudoku-hon*)

*dai jūhichi*), chapter 18, “The Merits of Joyful Acceptance” (*Myōhōrengekyō Zuiki Kodoku-hon dai jūhachi*), and chapter 19, “The Merits of the Preacher” (*Myōhōrengekyō Hosshi Kudoku-hon dai jūku*). It is not correct for everything not to be written out, but if I had copied the entire sixth scroll of the Lotus Sutra, the scroll would have been too thick. Therefore, I wrote the four chapter titles at the beginning, and then wrote out the entire text of chapter 16 (*Juryo* chapter) from

妙 法 蓮 華 經  
Myō hō en ge kyō

如 來 壽 量 品 第 十 六  
Nyo rai ju ryō hon. Dai jū roku.

爾 時 佛 告 諸 菩 薩 及 一 切 大 眾 諸 善 男 子  
Ni ji butsu go. Sho bo satsu gyu. Is sai dais hu. Sho zen nan shi.

to

每 自 作 是 念 以 何 令 衆 生  
Mai ji sa ze nen. I ga ryō shu jō.

得 入 無 上 道 速 成 就 佛 身  
Toku nyu mu jō dō. Soku jō ju bus<sup>^</sup>shin,

which is what the Nichiren Daishonin *Omiesama* is actually looking at. To make the scroll, I used a red rod as the axle for the scroll and dyed Japanese paper yellow with turmeric, which acts as an insecticide to repel the bugs. It is my earnest wish that this scroll of the Sutra will last for 100 or 200 years into the future without being eaten by bugs.

Rather than enshrining the *Omidoshiki-Omido* style<sup>21</sup>, which represents the era during Nichiren Daishonin’s lifetime, local temples arrange the *Omiesamas* in the *Kyakuden* style<sup>22</sup>, which represents the era after Nichiren Daishonin passed away. If my skills and time permit, I will carve a Nikko Shonin *Omiesama* in the future. It is my

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<sup>21</sup> Omidoshiki-Omido style – see page 3 herein.

<sup>22</sup> Kyaduken style – see page 3 herein.

intention to create the *Sanbo* style<sup>23</sup> (representing the Three Treasures of the Buddha, the Law, and the Priest) and the *Kyakuden* style, representing the era after the Daishonin's death. This is the arrangement I want to keep in front of the Gohonzon at Sanbo-in.

It is my hope that believers, with a true heart of faith, come to understand the *Omiesama*, and develop an even deeper faith.

Please share your thoughts on the *Omiesama* without hesitation. Ask me anything about it, and about faith in general, as often as you like. I truly hope you continue your deep faith and pure heart as much as possible.



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<sup>23</sup> Sanbo style – see page three herein.

# GOSHO SELECTION

## OPENING THE EYES OF WOODEN OR PAINTED IMAGES<sup>24</sup>

The Buddha possesses thirty-two features.<sup>25</sup> All of them represent the physical aspect. Thirty-one of them, from the lowest, the markings of the thousand-spoked wheel on the sole of each foot,<sup>26</sup> up to the unseen crown of his head,<sup>27</sup> belong to the category of visible and non-coextensive physical existences.<sup>28</sup> They can therefore be depicted in tangible form, such as pictures or statues. The remaining feature, the pure and far-reaching voice,<sup>29</sup> belongs to the category of invisible and coextensive physical existences.<sup>30</sup> It therefore cannot be captured either in a painting or in a wooden image.

Since the Buddha's passing, two kinds of images, wooden and painted, have been made of him. They possess thirty-one features but lack the pure and far-reaching voice. Therefore, they are not equal to the Buddha. They are also devoid of the spiritual aspect. The Buddha in the flesh is to a wooden or painted image what the heavens are to the earth or clouds to mud. Why, then, does the *Nehangyo Gobun*<sup>31</sup> state that both the living Buddha and a wooden or painted image made of him after his death bestow equal benefit? Indeed, the *Daiyoraku Sutra*<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. Four, p. 27

<sup>25</sup> Thirty-two features: Remarkable physical characteristics which Buddhas, wheel-turning kings and others are said to possess.

<sup>26</sup> A Buddha is said to possess the markings of a Wheel of the Law on the sole of each foot.

<sup>27</sup> This feature is also often cited as a protuberant knot of flesh resembling a topknot on the crown of the Buddha's head. The top of the Buddha's head is said to be unseen, indicating his inconceivably great wisdom, the boundlessness of his enlightened life, etc.

<sup>28</sup> Category of visible and non-coextensive physical existences: The first of the three categories of physical existences enumerated in the *Abidon Shin Ron*. "Non-coextensive" here means that the physical existences in this category cannot simultaneously occupy the same space. The second category is invisible and non-coextensive physical existences. The third category is invisible and coextensive physical existences. Mention of this third category immediately follows in the text.

<sup>29</sup> Pure and far-reaching voice: Also called the voice which reaches to the Brahma Heaven. According to the *Daichido Ron*, the voice of a Buddha delights those who hear it; it touches the depths of people's hearts and arouses a feeling of reverence.

<sup>30</sup> According to the *Kusha Ron*, all kinds of sounds and voices including the Buddha's pure and far-reaching voice fall under the category of invisible and non-coextensive physical existences. However, the Daishonin assigns the Buddha's pure and far-reaching voice to the category of invisible and coextensive physical existences, probably to emphasize that it embodies the Buddha's teachings.

<sup>31</sup> *Nehangyo Gobun*: Another name of the *Daihatsunehangyo Gobun* (Epilogue to the *Daihatsunehan Sutra*). The *Daihatsunehan Sutra* is a Chinese version of the *Nirvana Sutra*, a general term for any of the sutras recording the teachings which Shakyamuni Buddha is said to have expounded immediately before his death or those sutras describing the events surrounding his entry into nirvana. The *Nehangyo Gobun*, which consists of two fascicles, was translated by Jnanabhadra of the T'ang dynasty. It describes the cremation of the Buddha's body, the distribution of his ashes, etc.

<sup>32</sup> *Daiyoraku Sutra*: Another name of the *Bosatsu Yoraku Sutra* (*Sutra of the Bodhisattvas' Jewel-like Bodies*). It consists of

absolutely declares that a wooden or painted image is inferior to the living Buddha.

When one places a sutra in front of a wooden or painted image of the Buddha, the image becomes endowed with all thirty-two features. Yet, even though it has the thirty-two features, without the spiritual aspect it is in no way equal to a Buddha, for even the beings in the world of Humanity or Heaven may possess the thirty-two features.<sup>33</sup> When the *Gokai Sutra*<sup>34</sup> is placed before a wooden or painted image having thirty-one features, the image becomes equal to a wheel-turning king.<sup>35</sup> When the *Juzen Ron*<sup>36</sup> is placed before it, the image becomes equal to Taishaku. When the *Shutsuyoku Ron*<sup>37</sup> is placed before it, the image becomes equal to Bonten. But in none of these cases does it in any way become equal to a Buddha.

When an Agon sutra is placed in front of a wooden or painted image, the image becomes equal to a man of Learning.<sup>38</sup> When one of the common *prajna* teachings,<sup>39</sup> which were preached at the various ceremonies held during the Hodo and *Hannya* periods,<sup>40</sup> is placed

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fourteen fascicles and was translated by Chu-fo-nien of the Later Ch'in dynasty (384-417). It describes the principal practices which bodhisattvas should carry out.

<sup>33</sup> In the following sentences, Nichiren Daishonin uses a wheel-turning king as an example of a being in the world of Humanity who possesses the thirty-two features, and the gods Taishaku and Bonten as examples of beings in the world of Heaven.

<sup>34</sup> *Gokai Sutra*: "Sutra of the Five Precepts." The five precepts are the precepts to be observed by lay people. They are: (1) not to kill, (2) not to steal, (3) not to commit unlawful sexual intercourse, (4) not to lie and (5) not to drink intoxicants. The expression *Gokai Sutra* may refer to any one of the sutras dealing with the five precepts, and it is also used as a generic term for all these sutras. It is not certain in which sense the Daishonin uses it here.

<sup>35</sup> Wheel-turning king: An ideal ruler in Indian mythology. In Buddhism, wheel-turning kings are regarded as 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 wheels which they were given by heaven at the time of their coronation. These wheels are of four kinds: gold, silver, copper and iron.

<sup>36</sup> *Juzen Ron*: "On the Ten Good Precepts." The ten precepts are precepts for lay believers of Mahayana. They are prohibitions against the ten evils of: (1) killing, (2) stealing, (3) unlawful sexual intercourse, (4) lying, (5) flattery or random and irresponsible speech, (6) defaming, (7) duplicity, (8) greed, (9) anger and (10) the holding of mistaken views. Buddhism teaches that one can be born in the world of Heaven by embracing these precepts. The expression *Juzen Ron* may refer to any one of the sutras or treatises dealing with the ten good precepts, and is also used as a generic term for all these sutras and treatises. It is not certain in which sense the Daishonin uses it here.

<sup>37</sup> *Shutsuyoku Ron*: "On Emancipation from the World of Desire." Buddhism teaches that one can free himself from the world of desire and be born in the four meditation heavens in the world of form by practicing the four stages of meditation. The expression *Shutsuyoku Ron* may refer to any one of the sutras or treatises dealing with the four stages of meditation, and is also used as a generic term for all these sutras and treatises. It is not certain in which sense the Daishonin uses it here.

<sup>38</sup> Shakyamuni expounded the teachings of the *Agon* sutras chiefly for men of Learning in order to enable them to attain the stage of arhat, the highest stage of Hinayana enlightenment.

<sup>39</sup> Common *prajna* teachings: The *prajna* teachings which were expounded in common for both men of the two vehicles (Learning and Realization) and for novice bodhisattvas. *Prajna* means the wisdom which illuminates all phenomena and their essential truth. In terms of the four teachings of doctrine, a system of comparative classification set forth by T'ien-t'ai, the common *prajna* teachings correspond to the connecting teaching (*jap tsugyo*).

<sup>40</sup> Hodo and *Hannya* periods: The third and fourth of the five periods into which T'ien-t'ai divided Shakyamuni's teachings. The Hodo period, which follows the *Agon* period, or the period of Hinayana sutras, includes various Mahayana sutras such as the *Vimalakirti Sutra*, *Ryoga Sutra*, *Dainichi Sutra*, *Kongocho Sutra* and *Soshitsuji Sutra*. The *Hannya* period includes the *Hannya (Wisdom)* sutras, or the sutras which deal with the teaching of *prajna-paramita* or the perfection of wisdom.

before it, the image becomes equal to a man of Realization. When one of the specific or perfect teachings preached during the Kegon, Hodo or Hannya period is placed before it, the image becomes equal to a bodhisattva. Yet in none of these cases either does it in any way become equal to a Buddha. The mudras or mantras<sup>41</sup> of the Buddhas Butsugen and Dainichi<sup>42</sup> who appear in the *Dainichi*, *Kongocho* and *Soshitsuji* sutras are useless, for, although their names Butsugen and Dainichi respectively mean the Buddha-eye and Great Sun, in reality they do not possess these qualities. Similarly, even the Buddha who appears in the *Kegon* Sutra is not the Buddha of the perfect teaching,<sup>43</sup> though his name suggests that he is.

When the Lotus Sutra is placed before an image possessing thirty-one features, the image never fails to become the Buddha of the pure and perfect teaching.<sup>44</sup> It is for this reason that the *Fugen* Sutra,<sup>45</sup> referring to the Buddha of the Lotus Sutra, explains, "The three enlightened properties<sup>46</sup> of the Buddha's life arise from the *Hodo*."<sup>47</sup> "*Hodo*" in this phrase does not mean the sutras of the Hodo period; it indicates the Lotus Sutra. The *Fugen* Sutra also states, "This Mahayana sutra is the eye of all Buddhas because, through its teachings, they acquire the five types of vision."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mudras and mantras: Ritual elements of Shingon worship. Mudras are signs and gestures made with the hands and fingers, which symbolize the enlightenment and vows of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Mantras are formulas consisting of secret words or syllables which are said to embody mystic powers. Esoteric Shingon regards mudras and mantras as a way of achieving union with the Buddha Dainichi (Skt Mahavairochana).

<sup>42</sup> Butsugen and Dainichi: Buddhas revealed in the esoteric teaching. Butsugen (Buddha-eye) is said to give birth to all other Buddhas. He is also called Butsugen Butsumo, Butsumo literally meaning the mother of all Buddhas. Dainichi (Great Sun) is also regarded as the source from which all other Buddhas and bodhisattvas spring.

<sup>43</sup> Buddha of the perfect teaching: An expression used in contrast to "provisional Buddha." Here, the Buddha of the perfect teaching as expounded in the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha of the *Kegon* Sutra is Vairochana Buddha. Vairochana means "coming from or belonging to the sun."

<sup>44</sup> Buddha of the pure and perfect teaching: The Buddha of the Lotus Sutra. There are two categories of perfect teaching: that expounded in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings and that taught in the Lotus Sutra itself. The pure and perfect teaching means the latter.

<sup>45</sup> *Fugen* Sutra: "*Sutra of Meditation on Bodhisattva Fugen*," an epilogue to the Lotus Sutra. Following the *Kambotsu* (28th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the *Fugen* Sutra describes how to meditate on Bodhisattva Fugen and explains the benefit of this practice. It also exhorts people to believe in and propagate the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>46</sup> Three enlightened properties: Also called the three bodies. The property of the Law or Dharma body (*hosshin*), the property of wisdom or bliss body (*hoshin*) and the property of action or manifested body (*ojin*). The property of the Law means the truth or the Law to which a Buddha is enlightened; the property of wisdom means the wisdom to perceive the truth; and the property of action means the merciful actions of a Buddha to save people and the physical form which the Buddha assumes in this world for that purpose. Before the Lotus Sutra was taught, the three properties were often considered to be three different types of Buddhas, but in the Lotus Sutra they were shown to be the three aspects of a single Buddha.

<sup>47</sup> *Hodo*: Here, the Lotus Sutra. The word *Hodo* consists of the two characters *ho* and *do*. *Ho* is interpreted as correct in doctrine and *do* as impartial or universal. For this reason, the term *Hodo* is generally used to refer to the Mahayana sutras.

<sup>48</sup> Five types of vision: Five kinds of perceptive faculty. They are: (1) the eye of common mortals, which distinguishes color and form; (2) the divine eye, or the ability of heavenly beings to see beyond the physical limitations of darkness or distance; (3) the eye of wisdom, or the ability of people of the two vehicles to perceive the non-substantiality of all phenomena; (4) the eye of the Law, by which bodhisattvas penetrate all teachings in order to save the people; and (5) the eye of the Buddha, which perceives the true nature of life spanning past, present and future. The eye of the Buddha includes all the other four perceptive faculties.



The written words of the Lotus Sutra express in visible and non-coextensive form the Buddha's pure and far-reaching voice, which is itself invisible and coextensive. They therefore possess the two physical aspects of color and form. The Buddha's pure and far-reaching voice, which once vanished, has reappeared in the visible form of written words to benefit the people.

A person gives utterance to speech on two occasions. On one occasion, he does so to tell other people what he himself does not believe, in an effort to deceive them. His voice in this case "accords with other's minds."<sup>49</sup> On the other, the person gives voice to what he truly has in mind. Thus his thoughts are expressed in his voice. The mind represents the spiritual aspect, and the voice, the physical aspect. The spiritual aspect manifests itself in the physical. A person can know another's mind by listening to his voice. This is because the physical aspect reveals the spiritual aspect. The physical and spiritual, which are one in essence, manifest themselves as two distinct aspects; thus the Buddha's mind found expression as the written words of the Lotus Sutra. These written words are the Buddha's mind in a different form. Therefore, those who read the Lotus Sutra must not regard it as consisting of mere written words, for those words are in themselves the Buddha's mind.

For this reason, T'ien-t'ai in his commentary<sup>50</sup> states: "When the Buddha expounds the Law only after repeated entreaties from his listeners, he expounds the heart of his teaching. The heart of his teaching is the Buddha's mind, and the Buddha's mind is itself the Buddha's wisdom. The Buddha's wisdom is extremely profound. Therefore, the Buddha refuses three times to proceed with his teaching, and his listeners entreat him four times to continue to preach.<sup>51</sup> The preaching of the Lotus Sutra was accompanied by such difficulties. Compared to the Lotus Sutra, the preaching of the other sutras was an easy matter." In this commentary, T'ien-t'ai uses the term "Buddha's mind" to indicate that the sutra, itself a physical entity, actually embodies the Buddha's spiritual aspect.

Because the Lotus Sutra manifests the Buddha's spiritual aspect, when one embodies that spiritual aspect in a wooden or painted image possessing thirty-one features, the image in its entirety becomes the living Buddha. This is what is meant by the enlightenment of plants.

It is for this reason that T'ien-t'ai states, "All things having color or fragrance are manifestations of the Middle Way."<sup>52</sup> Commenting on this, Miao-lo adds, "However, although people may admit that all things having color or fragrance are manifestations of the Middle Way, they are nevertheless shocked and harbor doubts when they hear for the first time the

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<sup>49</sup> "Accords with others' minds": A translation of the Buddhist term *zuitai*, which appears in the original text. *Zuitai* means the preaching method by which the Buddha expounds his provisional teachings according to the people's capacity in order to lead them to the true teaching. *Zuitai* also means the provisional teachings so expounded. The term is used in contrast to *zuijii* ("according with one's own mind," i.e., the Buddha's mind), or the teaching in which the Buddha directly reveals his enlightenment. Here the term *zuitai* is used in a broader sense to mean saying what others wish to hear.

<sup>50</sup> *Hokke Gengi*, vol. 10

<sup>51</sup> This exchange takes place in the *Hoben* (second) chapter of the Lotus Sutra when Shakyamuni has begun to reveal the principle of opening the three vehicles to reveal the one vehicle and is about to elaborate on this principle from a variety of angles. On behalf of the assembly, Shariputra repeatedly entreats him to preach. A similar exchange takes place at the beginning of the *Juryo* (16th) chapter, in which the multitude headed by Bodhisattva Miroku four times implores the Buddha to preach. This ritual indicates that the Buddha is about to reveal his true mind, and is not found in any sutra other than the Lotus.

<sup>52</sup> *Maka Shikan*, vol. 1.

doctrine that insentient beings possess the Buddha nature."<sup>53</sup> Ch'eng-kuan<sup>54</sup> of the Kegon school stole T'ien-t'ai's doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*, using it to interpret the Kegon Sutra.<sup>55</sup> Then he wrote, "Both the Lotus and Kegon sutras reveal the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*. However, the Kegon Sutra is the teaching of enlightenment for the people of the sudden teaching,<sup>56</sup> because it was preached earlier, while the Lotus Sutra is the teaching of enlightenment for people of the gradual teaching, because it was preached later. The Kegon Sutra is the root, because it preceded all the other sutras. The Lotus Sutra consists of nothing but branches and leaves."<sup>57</sup> He puffed himself up like a mountain, thinking that he alone had mastered the true teaching. In reality, however, he did not know about the enlightenment of plants, the heart of the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*. Miao-lo ridiculed the ignorance Ch'eng-kuan showed in the above-quoted statement.

Our contemporary scholars of the Tendai sect think that they alone have mastered the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen*. Yet they equate the Lotus Sutra with the *Kegon Sutra* or with the *Dainichi Sutra*. Their arguments do not go beyond even Ch'eng-kuan's views but remain on the same level as those of Shan-wu-wei and Pu-k'ung. In the final analysis, when the eye-opening ceremony<sup>58</sup> for a newly-made wooden or painted image is conducted by Shingon priests, the image becomes, not a true Buddha, but a provisional one. Indeed, it does not even become a provisional Buddha. Even though it may resemble the Buddha in appearance, in reality it remains the same insentient plant from which it originated. Moreover, it does not even remain an insentient plant; it becomes a devil or a demon. This is because the erroneous doctrine of the Shingon priests, expressed in mudras and mantras, becomes the mind of the wooden or painted image. This is like those instances in which a person's mind causes him to

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<sup>53</sup> *Maka Shikan Bugyoden Guketsu*, vol. 1.

<sup>54</sup> Ch'eng-kuan (738-839): The fourth patriarch of the Kegon school in T'ang China. In 775 he practiced the T'ien-t'ai meditation under Miao-lo and later studied under many teachers of the various schools. He eventually succeeded the third Kegon patriarch Fa-tsang and propagated the Kegon doctrines. He lectured on the Kegon Sutra at Ta-hua-yen-ssu temple and produced a number of commentaries, including the *Kegongyo Sho*.

<sup>55</sup> Ch'eng-kuan took the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* and read it into the passage in the *Kegon Sutra*: "The mind is like a skilled painter." He went so far as to assert that the doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* was also revealed in the *Kegon Sutra*, the basic scripture of his own school. Moreover, although he claimed to have understood *ichinen sanzen*, he denied that insentient beings have the Buddha nature.

<sup>56</sup> This refers to the perfect teaching expounded for those people who have the capacity to attain enlightenment through the sudden teaching. The "sudden teaching" means those teachings which the Buddha preached directly from his own enlightenment without giving his listeners preparatory instruction. "The teaching of enlightenment for the people of the gradual teaching," mentioned subsequently, means the perfect teaching expounded for those people with the capacity to attain enlightenment through the gradual teaching. The "gradual teaching" means those teachings which the Buddha expounded to gradually elevate the people's capacity. Ch'eng-kuan asserted that although both the Lotus Sutra and the *Kegon Sutra* lead to enlightenment, the Buddha taught the former as the conclusion of a gradual process of instruction but expounded the latter to people of superior capacity directly from his own enlightenment without giving any prior instruction. For this reason, he declared the *Kegon Sutra* superior to the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>57</sup> This assertion appears in the *Kegon Zuisho Engi Sho*, Ch'eng-kuan's commentary on the *Kegon Sutra*, though the wording differs slightly.

<sup>58</sup> Eye-opening ceremony: Ceremony for consecrating a newly-made Buddha image. By means of this ceremony, the image is endowed with the Buddha's spiritual property, thus making it an object of worship.

alter and turn into a rock, as happened with Uluka<sup>59</sup> or Kapila.<sup>60</sup>

Unless one who has grasped the essence of the Lotus Sutra conducts the eye-opening ceremony for a wooden or painted image, it will be as if a masterless house were to be occupied by a thief or as if, upon a person's death, a demon were to enter his body. When, in present-day Japan, eye-opening ceremonies for the Buddha images are conducted according to the Shingon rite, demons occupy them and deprive people of their lives, for a demon is also known as a "robber of life." Moreover, devils enter those images and deprive people of benefits, and another name for a devil is a "robber of benefit." Because the people worship demons, they will bring the country to ruin in their present lifetime, and because they revere devils, they will fall into the hell of incessant suffering in their next existence.

When a person dies and his spirit departs from his body, a demon may enter in its place and destroy his descendants. This is what is meant by a demon called *gaki*,<sup>61</sup> a hungry spirit that devours even itself. However, if a wise person extols the Lotus Sutra and with it inspires the dead person's remains, then, although the deceased's body remains human, his mind will become the Dharma body.<sup>62</sup> This accords with the doctrine that one can in his present form attain the stage where he perceives the non-birth and non-extinction of the phenomenal world. A wise person who has mastered the perfect teaching of the Kegon, Hodo or Hannya<sup>63</sup> can bring a dead person's remains into the state of realizing the non-birth and non-extinction of all phenomena. This is what the Nirvana Sutra means when it states, "Although his body remains human, his mind will become equal to that of the Buddha." Chunda<sup>64</sup> set an example of attaining in his present body the realization of the non-birth and non-extinction of all phenomena.

If a wise person enlightened to the Lotus Sutra conducts a service for a deceased person, the deceased's body, just as it is, will become the Dharma body.<sup>65</sup> This is what the phrase "in one's present form" means. Then the wise man will retrieve the dead person's departed spirit, bring it back into his remains and transform it into the Buddha's mind. This is what the phrase "attaining Buddhahood" indicates. The words "in one's present form" represent the physical

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<sup>59</sup> Uluka: The founder of the Vaisheshika school, one of the six main schools of Brahmanism in India. Fearful of death, he took a drug for longevity and changed himself into a rock.

<sup>60</sup> Kapila: The founder of the Samkhya school, one of the six major schools of Brahmanism. Kapila was also fearful of death and ate a certain sweet fruit to prolong his life, changing himself into a rock.

<sup>61</sup> Gaki: (Skt *preta*) The spirit of a deceased person that is continuously tormented by hunger. The realm of hungry spirits was also incorporated into the Ten Worlds as the world of Hunger.

<sup>62</sup> Dharma body: Also called the property of the Law. One of the three bodies. The fundamental truth or Law to which the Buddha is enlightened. It means the true nature of the Buddha's life.

<sup>63</sup> Perfect teaching of the Kegon, Hodo or Hannya: The perfect teaching as expounded in the Kegon, Hodo and Hannya periods. It corresponds to the first of the two categories of perfect teaching explained in note 44.

The last of Shakyamuni's four teachings of doctrine as classified by T'ien-t'ai. The teaching which completely clarifies the inseparable relationship of all phenomena and the ultimate truth, and enables all people to attain enlightenment. The term "perfect teaching" is often used synonymously with the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>64</sup> Chunda: A blacksmith in Pava Village. When Shakyamuni visited Pava Village the day before he entered nirvana, Chunda heard him preach the Nirvana Sutra. Moved and delighted, he invited the Buddha to his home for a meal. As a benefit of this offering, he is said to have attained the realization of the non-birth and non-extinction of all phenomena. The passage from the Nirvana Sutra quoted in the preceding sentence refers to the benefit Chunda received.

<sup>65</sup> "The deceased's body, just as it is, will become the Dharma body" refers to the principle that a common mortal attains Buddhahood in his present form without discarding his identity as a common mortal.

aspect, and "attaining Buddhahood," the spiritual. The deceased person's physical and spiritual aspects will be transformed into the mystic reality and mystic wisdom<sup>66</sup> of beginningless time. This is attaining Buddhahood in one's present form.

Thus the Lotus Sutra states, "...This reality consists of appearance (the body of the dead person), nature (his mind), entity (the true entity of his body and mind),..."<sup>67</sup> It also reads, "Having profoundly mastered the aspects of offence and benefit,/Universally illuminating all ten directions,/The subtle and pure Dharma body/Has perfected the thirty-two features..."<sup>68</sup> In this last quotation, the first two lines indicate the realization of the non-birth and non-extinction of all phenomena, and the latter two, the attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form. The model of the latter is the dragon king's daughter, while that of the former is Chunda.

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

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<sup>66</sup> Mystic reality and mystic wisdom: The unfathomable truth and the wisdom of the Buddha to perceive this truth. They represent the totality of the Buddha's life.

<sup>67</sup> Lotus Sutra, chap. 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., chap. 12. This is an excerpt from verses spoken by the dragon king's daughter just before her attainment of Buddhahood. The first two lines refer to the Buddha's profound wisdom that perceives the truth of all phenomena. The latter two lines refer to the physical manifestation of the Buddha's virtues.