

THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SPRING

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The Middle Way

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DaiJOBUTSU vs. JIHAD & HUMAN REVOLUTION

Reverend Raido Hirota
Mt. Holly, New Jersey
June 2008

QUESTION: Soka Gakkai¹ member Mariane Pearl, wife of slain *Wall Street Journal* reporter, Danny Pearl, says that “true Islamic jihad” is “the most courageous process a person can undertake. A jihadi fights with himself to overcome his own limitations in order to contribute to society at large. This slow and difficult battle, the true jihad, is what Buddhists call the ‘human revolution.’” Please explain the true goal of Nichiren Daishonin’s² Buddhism. And explain how the process of realizing *jobutsu*³ in Nichiren Daishonin’s true Buddhism exceeds, and is superior to ‘human revolution’ of Soka Gakkai and ‘jihad’ of Islam.

RH: There is no concept of human revolution in the Lotus Sutra or in Nichiren Daishonin’s goshu. If you deeply understood the words of Bodhisattva Jofukyo⁴ you would then understand that.

“Human Revolution” is a term used for a singular person, as well as a term that only applies

¹ Soka Gakkai – a worldly organization that wrongly uses some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in its own philosophy and practice.

² Nichiren Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

³ Jobutsu – Buddhahood, or enlightenment.

⁴ Bodhisattva Jofukyo – Bodhisattva Fukyo – a bodhisattva described in the 20th chapter of the Lotus sutra who revered everyone for their inherent Buddha nature.

to this life. The Soka Gakki grafted “human revolution” onto the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. As I’ve mentioned previously, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are all faiths with the same roots. Those religions teach practitioners to live a life free of sin in order to gain the keys to heaven. In Judeo-Christian-Islamic beliefs the goal is for human’s to look good in the eyes of god. This is very similar to the concept of human revolution in the Soka Gakkai. The Soka Gakkai’s human revolution is just that, human-based. It is only for human beings. In the teachings of Christianity, if you don’t gain acceptance, then you automatically go to hell, with no chance to redeem yourself. The Soka Gakkai chants the Lotus Sutra as we do, but they curse anyone who opposes them, and say they want ill things to happen to them. With Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings, as I’ve mentioned on other occasions, all things are encompassed in one Law. The thought of trying to gain acceptance from god, or achieving “human revolution” goes against the grain of the teachings of *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in a single life moment). Human revolution is just a one-time thing – just for human beings.

When Mariane Pearl says that human revolution is a Buddhist concept, and that *jihad* in Islam is similar, she is not walking in the path of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings.

Believer 1 (B1): I think the big philosophical difference is that in true Buddhism you become enlightened as you are, at the moment in which you chant in front of Gohonzon.⁵ It’s not that you ascend through stages of perfection until you reach nirvana or enlightenment. This is the difference between true, original Buddhism and the provisional Buddhism and other provisional religions.

RH: Those religions, where you ascend to different levels by degrees, require you to have certain book knowledge. They also have precepts or commandments. It’s good to live by commandments, but in such religions, if you fail to live by the commandments, you are viewed as a sinner and are cast out. A true religion should be one that encompasses all things. Even if you go astray from the right path, a true religion should be able to support that.

B2: The Gakkai core is: I’ve attained a higher rank than you, so I’m better than you. So you have to follow me. They are not about following the core teachings of the Law.

RH: The Gakkai forms a circle around one person, Daisaku Ikeda, instead of around Gohonzon and the Law.

B3: So the true *jobutsu*—enlightenment, the goal of our faith—is that when we sit in front of Gohonzon and our daimoku is directed towards the Buddha-nature that is in all things, and is for the benefit of all things and not just ourselves alone, because the Buddha nature is the same in all things, then I would assume that this would be the process of jobutsu?

RH: That’s true. There are two meanings to Gohonzon. One is that it is a mirror that reflects the life of the person in front of it. The other is *Ho* in *Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō* at the center. *Ho* is the Law.

It is difficult to explain things in detail, but if any individual eliminates from his mind beliefs that are wrong, he would start finding within himself what the true Law is.

⁵ Gohonzon – the scroll that is the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, representing the universal Law of *Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō* and the Buddha nature in all things.

DISCUSSION ON QUESTIONS FROM A ZEN PRACTITIONER

With Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, New Jersey

June 2008

QUESTION: I am a Zen practitioner, but for a year and a half I have been chanting the daimoku⁶ of the Lotus Sutra.⁷ I first started chanting for my desires and wishes the way the Gakkai teaches, but now I simply chant, directing my daimoku to the Gohonzon inside me. Can't I achieve enlightenment?

RH: Nichiren Daishonin asserted that Zen was an insane practice because its premise was bankrupt. Why? Because Zen teaches that meditation will unify the spirit, eliminate bewilderment and confusion from the mind and bring about enlightenment. But like all Buddhas, one becomes enlightened through the Law of Namu-myoho-enge-kyo.⁸ Hundreds and thousands of people, all with different ideas and thoughts, meditate and believe that they will attain enlightenment. How can you call these different thoughts enlightenment? That's why it is called an insane religion. People practice Zen for their own self-satisfaction which creates the wrong circumstances and conditions. That is why Zen is called crazy. Discard Zen, discard the Gakkai, and only practice Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings and become enlightened.

QUESTION: In no Nichiren writings or priest writings or lay writings have I found any explanations as to why Zen Buddhism is incorrect. Zen has direct lineage to Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren does not. So what is your explanation?

RH: In The "Opening of the Eyes" Goshō (MWND Vol. 2 p. 119), the "Letter to Akimoto" (MWND Vol. 7 p. 196-198) and "On Reprimanding Hachiman" (WND Vol. 2 p. 931) Daishonin warns that Zen is an evil and wrong teaching. Zen asserts "that the essence of Buddhism is transferred from mind to mind rather than via the sutras." And yet, they still read Shakyamuni's sutras. As you can see, their mind and spirit are split which causes them to be crazy.

B3: Would a person go crazy if he practices Zen and chants the daimoku, expecting to receive enlightenment because he's looking for Gohonzon in his heart? He has two parents—two different beliefs.

RH: My thoughts are that for a lot of European and American Zen practitioners they may see the performance of *za-zen*, which is long meditation, as an oriental thing, and find it exotic. That could be why they are attracted to it and practice it. I've noticed that there are a lot of Zen priests who are American and European. *Za-zen* is a practice that Zen practitioners do to train their minds. I understand that the practitioners are concentrating while they meditate, but the question becomes, what are they

⁶ Daimoku – Odaimoku – chanting Namu-myoho-enge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra

⁷ Lotus Sutra – the highest teaching taught by Shakyamuni, taught in the last eight years of his life. It reveals that all life has Buddha nature, and that the life of Buddha is eternal.

⁸ Namu-myoho-enge-kyo - the Mystic Law; the ultimate Law of life and the universe; the Buddha nature in all things.

concentrating on? And I doubt that Zen priests understand that. So in the temples the objects of worship vary from temple to temple, and all the practices vary as well. It's different in every temple.

When Nichiren Daishonin saw practitioners of *za-zen* engaging in their practice, and when ten out of ten or one hundred out of one hundred practitioners all claimed to have achieved enlightenment, Daishonin noticed that all ten, or all one hundred had a different realization of enlightenment. Daishonin found that questionable. Daishonin concluded that the Zen practice was an egotistical way for someone to say, I achieved enlightenment on this day or in this month in this year.

Zen practitioners believe in teachings that are outside the core of the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha⁹. They are practicing something that is outside the realm of the Buddha. That is to say, since Shakyamuni Buddha created this Buddhism or school of thought, and taught it in different phases, which we could classify as elementary school (Hinayana)¹⁰, junior high school (provisional Mahayana)¹¹, and high school (true Mahayana),¹² Zen does not fall into any of these classifications. It is outside Shakyamuni's school of thought. The Zen practitioners believe in wordless transmission. So they're practicing something that is not based on a sutra. In fact, Zen does not have a real sutra. But paradoxically, even though they adhere to this "no text" or wordless doctrine, they go ahead and chant the sutra and the teachings of the Buddha, and teach it to their disciples. Daishonin questioned, "Is that not a teaching where their mind is split?" Nichiren Daishonin admonished them for having a split mind and, as I said earlier, received a lot of criticism for it. But Daishonin had good reason for doing it.

B3: So why does Zen claim that they have a direct link to Shakyamuni Buddha?

RH: On one hand, Zen says you don't need the teachings of Shakyamuni or the sutra, while on the other hand they say they are a direct link to Shakyamuni, and they recite some sutras. Hence they contradict themselves.

There is a story where Shakyamuni was holding a lotus blossom, and as he twisted it he gave a smile. All but one person who observed this looked puzzled because they didn't understand what he was doing. Mahakashyapa,¹³ the disciple who did not look puzzled, smiled knowingly along with the Buddha. So Zen practitioners call Mahakashyapa the first in the direct lineage of Shakyamuni.

From the Daishonin's point of view, he can understand that something can be transmitted without words, and that a lot of words can be spoken and nothing transmitted. Nonetheless, when Shakyamuni smiled, there are many ways to have perceived that. If you don't say what you are thinking, there can be too many interpretations of a single act. Thus, Nichiren Daishonin questions the Zen practice because it is derived from one unspoken moment, and based on subjective perception. Zen is so imbedded in the Japanese culture that many Japanese believe it is a Japanese religion. On the contrary, Zen originated in China and was brought to Japan. The question indicates that there is no explanation in the writings of Nichiren as to why Zen Buddhism is incorrect, but throughout his life Nichiren Daishonin explained why Zen is wrong.

⁹ Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE-949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism.

¹⁰ Hinayana – Lesser Vehicle – teachings to eliminate human desires, upholding precepts, adhering to the teachings taught in the first 14 years of Shakyamuni's preaching life, and thereby achieving personal enlightenment.

¹¹ Provisional Mahayana – teachings expounded as a temporary means to lead people to the true teachings.

¹² True Mahayana – Great Vehicle – the Lotus Sutra—the teaching for the enlightenment of all living things.

¹³ Mahakashyapa – one of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples. He propagated Hinayana Buddhism for 20 years following the death of Shakyamuni. According to the Zen sect, Shakyamuni wordlessly transferred his true enlightenment to Mahakashyapa.

QUESTION: Isn't saying that the entire meaning of the Lotus Sutra is contained in *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* an oversimplification? If we are all Buddhas, then why do we need books or mantras?

RH: To explain *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* you need the sutra. If you don't have the sutra you can't perceive the meaning of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* and attain enlightenment. This question is also related to the discussion of Zen. Zen practitioners believe that by meditating for a long time they can reach enlightenment. Their belief is: don't think – just meditate.

B3: There are so many American writers like Alan Watts who write about Zen all time. Ironically, there's plenty of Zen text out there, and it is always very esoteric. Almost like haiku. In fact, there's a whole library of Zen books.

RH: Even if you have the Buddha's heart inside of you, and you chant the sutra everyday, if you are chanting but not understanding why, then it's like having a pot of gold that's surrounded by filth, concealing the gold so that you don't even know you have it. The Zen practitioner meditates and meditates and meditates. And the more he meditates, the more lost he will become. You need the day to day instructions as taught by Nichiren Daishonin so that your faith will stay straight.

B4: The earlier question mentioned chanting to the Gohonzon inside you. If you don't have a Gohonzon, where do you direct your chanting? In or out?

RH: What I was taught was to chant towards the East when I travel. But what I do now, because every hotel room, or every room I may stay in has a different layout, I chant facing the window. It's important to have a Gohonzon in your house, because as human beings we are weak and on instinct get lost. It's okay to go several days without Gohonzon while you are traveling, but to go several years is going to be very difficult. If you don't have a Gohonzon, the thought of getting lazy becomes ever stronger.

The criticism has been that Gohonzon has a shape and form so when you chant to it's idolatry. Nichiren Daishonin understood the weakness of human beings, and that we need something material or physical in order to gain an understanding. Something without form is harder for us to comprehend. That is why he inscribed Gohonzon.

The Gohonzon is the grass and the trees. It's made out of trees and rice grass. It can be carved into a tree, and that tree becomes the Buddha-nature. The Gohonzon symbolizes the unity throughout all nature. It can be inscribed on anything. The inscription of Gohonzon on the grass and the trees bestows them with Buddha-nature. But the grass itself is not the Gohonzon; the tree is not Gohonzon.

It may look like the practitioner is chanting to the face of Gohonzon. But as Nichiren Daishonin teaches, believers should chant to the depths of Gohonzon – the meaning of Gohonzon – not the object, but the Buddha-nature within. One should always seek beyond the object.

A lot of Soka Gakkai members praise each other for having a bigger or nicer Gohonzon. Yet, Nichiren Daishonin stated that one should understand that Gohonzon is not a personal belonging. It's not your Gohonzon. Gohonzon is Nichiren Daishonin's revelation, created so that practitioners have a guideline for growth. It's a teaching.

So if your daughter, for instance, wants to be faithful, she should create the right environment for her beliefs and get a Gohonzon in her house.

B4: Would that require that she does the complete gongyo, etc.?

RH: Yes. Gongyo and daimoku.

B5: Namu-myoho-renge-kyo is not a mantra, it's the Law itself. Can you give us the definition of mantra? And why isn't daimoku a mantra?

RH: A mantra is a formula consisting of secret words or syllables that is said to be embodied with mystic powers and are often employed in esoteric rituals. The mantra of the Shingon religion is related to and chanted before their mandala. Their mandala is a circle with many Buddha's depicted surrounding Dainichi Buddha¹⁴ as the central figure. They chant to that Buddha. By comparison, the Gohonzon has the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo in the central position. It was the Law that Dainichi Buddha was enlightened to. Practitioners of Shingon chant towards somebody who has achieved enlightenment, rather than chanting towards enlightenment itself, which is what Gohonzon represents. There are a lot of sects of Buddhism that chant or pray to a figure, or a mandala representing a person. The Gohonzon is the only representation of what Buddhas were enlightened to.

The Shingon sect claims that Dainichi Buddha is greater than Shakyamuni Buddha. They call him the Buddha of all Buddhas. But Dainichi never taught any sutras. So Shingon uses the sutras of Shakyamuni as their liturgy.

Many Zen sects pray to a representation of Bodhidharma,¹⁵ the founder of Zen in China. This is not any different than the Shingon sect; they are praying to a person to enlighten them.

Once I went to a Zen temple and saw on the altar a representation of Bodhisattva Kokuzo¹⁶ as the object of worship. There wasn't anyone around for me to talk to, so I went home and called the temple to ask why they had Kokuzo as their object of worship. The person who answered the phone said it doesn't matter who's on their object of worship, it only matters what the individual praying to it perceives it as. It's just something to focus on.

B6: When I was younger, I was told to chant for things, so that's how I chanted. But now, I just chant. I don't chant for anything. I don't have a goal.

RH: That's good. When I am chanting, sometimes my mind wanders and I get lost. Then I turn my mind back to concentrating on my enlightenment and the enlightenment of all things. When I visit someone who is ill or who is troubled, and whom I am counseling, I don't pray that they feel better or get better, I pray that they remember that Namu-myoho-renge-kyo is the true teaching. When you chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo for a one hundred year old person on his death bed to get better, he won't get better.

B7: Can you chant for someone to be happy? Won't the person be happy?

RH: Everyone perceives happiness differently. One's own happiness is different from another's. There is negative happiness too. For instance, ridiculing someone might make someone else happy. I heard that on 9/11 there was a Soka Gakkai member whose son was supposed to have been on the plane that was flown into the Pentagon, but his son overslept and missed the flight. The Gakkai member was overwhelmed with joy. I can understand how a family would feel if their son was safe. But I wouldn't call it equal happiness, because so many others perished. As everyone feels happiness

¹⁴ Dainichi Buddha – a Buddha of esoteric teachings who, it is said, is always in this world teaching the Law.

¹⁵ Bodhidharma – lived during the 5th and 6th centuries. He studied Mahayana Buddhism, then devoted himself to practicing meditation. He became the founder of Cha'an or Zen in China.

¹⁶ Bodhisattva Kokuzo – the Bodhisattva of Space, because, it is said, his wisdom and good fortune were boundless.

on different levels and in different ways, real happiness should be a unified happiness where it benefits you and me—where it is felt by you and others. Referring back to the 9/11 story, I understand that it is very fortunate that the son is alive. But if you were to try to stand in the shoes of a parent, husband, wife, brother, sister or friend of someone who did not survive, you would ask why did their son survive and my son die. I want practitioners to feel the pain and the happiness of others. That is the true teaching.

B4: When I was in the Gakkai we were taught to chant for our desires. But I decided I didn't want to chant for a new job. I decided to chant for world peace and to chant for everybody's happiness. But then I hear here that there is no chanting for something—even on the most compassionate level. Even when you visit a sick person you're chanting with the belief that Namu-myho-renge-kyo is the true teaching. That's my observation.

RH: It's very different. *Kosen rufu*¹⁷ as defined by the Soka Gakkai is spreading the teachings to the whole world. Let's say the whole world believed in the Gakkai teachings. Would the whole world be at peace? It probably would not. The Gakkai also places blame for their inner turmoil on outside things. For example, in Japan, if there is a domestic dispute within a Gakkai household, and the family next door is Christian, they would say that they are having problems because their next door neighbors are Christian.

Your first priority should not be helping someone else; it should be admitting that you have problems. To slander other people for your own benefit and to spread that culture, climate, and spirit throughout the whole world will not bring about world peace.

Soka Gakkai Member (SGI): What is the vision of kosen-rufu in the Shoshin-kai¹⁸ group? Is planting the seed the goal of your chanting?

RH: No matter how many times you chant in front of Gohonzon for someone's enlightenment, it may be faster to just put it into a couple of words. Tell the person, rather than just praying for it for ten years or so. The actions of praying for ten years, or telling the person directly should be exactly the same. That should be the practice of a true practitioner.

B3: Both actions should be with the same heart.

RH: There are people who say I chant so much, but then they take no action. They just chant all day. Actually, sometimes I say to my wife, I wonder how so and so is doing? My wife replies, if you're thinking about him so much, you should write a postcard. If one of your friends has been sick for months and finally recovers, you meet him and you tell him, Oh, I was so worried about you the whole time. The friend replies, Oh, yeah, I didn't hear from you. What were you worried about?

SGI: Concerning *kai ji go nyu*. You just don't start the practice by chanting the loftiest goal. Isn't it better to introduce people gradually to the concepts of Buddhism? Then over time their understanding will change and grow?

¹⁷ Kosen-rufu – literally means the widespread propagation of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

¹⁸ Shoshin-kai – the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the study, protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.

RH: The Soka Gakkai from the very beginning teaches you to chant for your desires. Many of the members of my temple who were originally in the Soka Gakkai, still don't understand after 30 years of practicing with me, and even though I am constantly teaching that you do not chant for personal desires. But once a problem arises, or they have some trouble, they always revert back to praying for desires. I feel that when you learn something wrong in the beginning, it is very difficult to correct.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

With Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, New Jersey

June 2008

QUESTION: It is said in the Goshō¹⁹ that the three readings of the *junyoze*²⁰ represent the three bodies of Buddha.²¹ Is it bad to skip this in evening Gongyo?

Raido Hirota (RH): Nichiren Shoshu²² has a long history of reciting the *seo-ge*²³ which does not repeat the *junyoze* three times. In the authentic Nichiren Shoshu teachings the *junyoze* is recited one and not repeated. Moreover, the three repetitions of the *junyoze* represent the three truths (*santai*) and not the three bodies (*sanjin*). The three truths are *ku-tai*, *ke-tai* and *chu-tai* and concern the universe. Because the three truths are included in the *seo-ge* it's not necessary to repeat it three times. Also it doesn't mean that because you haven't recited it three times you haven't represented *ku ke chu* in your prayer. When you repeat the *junyoze* three times you are condensing the *seo-ge* that follows. If you don't repeat the *junyoze* three times, you have to recite the *seo-ge*. There's no meaning to repeating the *junyoze* three times with the *seo-ge*.

B1: What is *ku ke chu*?

RH: The actual sequence is *ke ku chu*. *Ke* refers to material existence—the existence in this world—or temporary existence. *Ku* is what happens when we die: we cease to exist, we become the air—non existence. And *chu* is the combination of the two. *Chu* literally means middle. It could be neither, or it could be both. So *ke* is the material, substance; *ku* is nothing; and *chu* is both.

¹⁹ Goshō –the sacred writings of Nichiren Daishonin

²⁰ Junyoze – enumeration of the Ten Factors in the Hoben (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra; *nyo ze so, nyoze sho, nyo ze tai*, etc.

²¹ Three bodies of Buddha – or the three enlightened properties of the Buddha – 1) the property of the Law or the truth to which the Buddha is enlightened; 2) the property of wisdom, or the ability to perceive the truth; and 3) the property of action or the physical body of the Buddha with which he carries out compassionate acts.

²² Nichiren Shoshu – the Buddhist religion that embraces and recites the true Law of Namu-myoho-enge-kyo as the original cause of enlightenment, and believes that Nichiren Daishonin is the true Buddha.

²³ Seo-ge – the extended Hoben chapter, beginning with the verse section that follows the *junyoze*.

QUESTION: In the Goshō, “Supremacy of the Law”²⁴ it says, “A woman’s soul is her husband. Without him, she has no soul.” Is this to be understood literally? Or please explain the meaning of this.

RH: Japan has a history of male domination of women. Even today there is still a strong tendency for men to have power over women. That is why men persecute women—because women are weak. As a result women are dependent on their men, and can’t live without their men’s support.

The Kamakura government during Daishōnin’s lifetime said that ideas presented in the Daishōnin’s teachings did not conform to the traditionally accepted male domination of women. In the goshō, “The Bow and Arrow”²⁵ (*Toki Ama Gozen Gohenji*) Daishōnin wrote, “It is the power of the bow that determines the flight of the arrow, the might of the dragon that controls the movement of the clouds, and the strength of the wife that guides the actions of her husband. In the same way, it is your support that has enabled Lord Toki to visit me here now. We know the fire by its smoke, discern the nature of the dragon by the rain, and recognize the wife by observing her husband. Thus, meeting here at this moment with Lord Toki, I feel as if I were seeing you.” Man and woman become one body that encourages each other, advises each other, supports each other and encourages each other to become enlightened.

B3: If that’s the case, why did the Daishōnin say, “a woman’s soul is her husband; without him she has no soul”?

RH: America seems like a “ladies first country.” But is there a misogynistic hierarchy where the man comes first?

B3: Yes, It’s worldwide.

RH: Regardless of whether it’s a man or a woman, society works where there is strong dominance over the people. And although there are strong women, typically a man should be stronger than a woman. Man and woman – weak and strong – both have to work together because it is impossible to live by yourself, and without the cooperation of man and woman, society would not populate.

The Kamakura era during the Daishōnin’s time was one of the more misogynistic eras in Japanese history. Nonetheless, Nichiren Daishōnin never said in the goshō that men were superior to women, or that men were stronger than women.

B6: Was it true that at certain times women were not allowed to chant?

When I, Nichiren, read the sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, I have not the slightest wish to become a woman. One sutra condemns women as emissaries of hell. Another describes them as large snakes. Still another likens them to bent and twisted trees. And there is even a sutra that describes them as people who have scorched the seed of Buddhahood.

Buddhist scriptures are not alone in this regard; non-Buddhist writings also [disdain women]. Someone named Jung Ch’i-ch’i, for example, sings in praise of three pleasures, one of which is the pleasure of not having been born into the world as a woman. It is widely accepted that disaster had its origins in the three women. Only in the Lotus Sutra do we read that a woman who embraces this sutra not only excels all other women but also surpasses all men

“The Unity of Husband and Wife”
The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin
Vol. 5, p. 156-157

²⁴ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, Vol. 3, p.196

²⁵ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, Vol. 7, p. 125

RH: Within all the religions – Zen and other Buddhist religions, and even Shinto – it was stipulated that when the woman was menstruating each month it was considered dirty. Women were therefore prohibited from sitting in front of the Buddha or the object of worship of a sect. But Nichiren saw menstruation as a natural condition of someone who bears children. He never perceived it as being dirty. Would you believe that as late as the end of the Edo period (1603-1868) people were not allowed to eat watermelons or tomatoes because of their red color and what that symbolized?

B4: So what does Daishonin mean by that? Is it just a reflection of the times—the Kamakura era? “A woman’s soul is her husband, without him she has no soul.”

RH: It’s a metaphor. Back then the husband was considered the “house,” and the woman’s position in life was to take care of the “house.” If there was no house to take care of, then what would the woman have? She would have nothing. Likewise, if the husband went away on business, and the wife departed because the husband was way, when he returned to the house, he would have nothing because the wife was gone. What Nichiren Daishonin is saying is that the oneness or bond of self and environment (*esho funi*) is the same as if the husband was taking care of the household business and is the self, and if there wasn’t a wife to support him, it would be the same as the mind and spirit, or the environment and self not bonding together. From the man’s perspective, if there was no woman, there would be no children, no offspring. From the woman’s perspective, if there was no man, even if she had a child, it would be difficult to raise the child on her own. So if you look at man and woman as one human being, if they don’t cooperate with each other, that singular person isn’t well formed.

I don’t know if this is true in America, but in Japan, if a woman can’t produce a child, that is automatic grounds for divorce, even if the fault is with the husband.

B3: Not in the States. Couldn’t the couple adopt?

RH: If it isn’t your child, then there is always that stigma. So even today there are a lot of people who say women should keep their mouths shut. I don’t say that. If I said that in my household where there are two strong women, it would be the reverse. The women in my household would talk all the more.

B8: It’s always been straight forward to me when Daishonin said there should be no discrimination amongst those who chant, whether they be men or women. That’s really clear. And it’s always been a tradition that within Nichiren Shoshu the possibility for women to become priests exists, and that it is as open for women as it is for men. So why aren’t there more women priests?

RH: Because in Japan we live in a society where males are dominant. It’s hard for a female to go against that flow of tradition. Even if there is an all boys high school that one day became coed, it would difficult for girls to attend the school.

In the Shingon and Nembutsu sects and other Buddhist sects throughout history it was taught that the male was dominant. But when Nichiren Daishonin came along, he preached that all people are equal. Because he taught that at that time during the Kamakura era, when everyone else was saying something else, he received overwhelming criticism.

From the Kamakura era (1185-1333) to the Meiji era (1868-1912) there was a caste system in Japan. The lowest class was the slave class, where even if you looked human, you weren’t treated as human. Among this lowliest of classes were fishermen, slaughterers and anyone who made a living by taking the life of another living thing. Nichiren Daishonin identified himself as a member of this lowest caste. By doing that, he knew that he wasn’t going to be treated as a being human. He believed

that a true religion could save people regardless of the class they were in—or even if you weren't treated as a human being. In the gosho there a story about a husband who wanted to stop chanting and stop being a faithful believer. The wife wrote a letter to Nichiren Daishonin explaining the situation. Daishonin wrote back to the husband, taking him to task. That a woman would expose her husband's actions, and that the Daishonin would act upon the words of a woman during the Kamakura era was a very significant occurrence.

So everyone here, whether you are the man or the woman in your family, husband or wife, or whether you are having arguments about who is right, forget all that and just be a pure believer.

GOSHO SELECTION

ON ATTAINING BUDDHAHOOD²⁶

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

Life at each moment encompasses both body and spirit and both self and environment of all sentient beings in every condition of life²⁷, as well as insentient beings -- plants, sky and earth, on down to the most minute particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the universe and is revealed in all phenomena. One awakened to this truth himself embodies this relationship. However, even though you chant and believe in Myoho-rence-kyo, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but some inferior teaching. "Inferior teachings" means those other than this sutra, which are all provisional and transient. No provisional teaching leads directly to enlightenment, and without the direct path to enlightenment you cannot attain Buddhahood, even if you practice lifetime after lifetime for countless aeons. Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime is then impossible. Therefore, when you chant the Mystic Law and recite the Lotus Sutra, you must summon up deep conviction that Myoho-rence-kyo is your life itself.

You must never seek any of Shakyamuni's teachings or the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the universe outside yourself. Your mastery of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of mortal sufferings in the least unless you perceive the nature of your own life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, any discipline or good deed will be meaningless. For example, a poor man cannot earn a penny just by counting his neighbor's wealth, even if he does so night and day. That is why Miao-lo states, "Unless one perceives the nature of his life, he cannot eradicate his evil karma." He means here that unless one perceives the nature of his life, his practice will become an endless, painful austerity. Miao-lo therefore condemns such students of Buddhism as non-Buddhist. He refers to the

²⁶ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol 1, p. 3

²⁷ In every condition of life – in any of the Ten Worlds, or *ichinen sanzen*.

passage in the Maka Shikan, "Although they study Buddhism, their views revert to those of non-Buddhists."

Whether you chant the Buddha's name²⁸, recite the sutra or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits in your life. With this conviction you should put your faith into practice. For example, the *Jomyo* Sutra says the Buddha's enlightenment is to be found in human life, thus showing that common mortals can attain Buddhahood and that the sufferings of birth and death can be transformed into nirvana. It further states that if the minds of the people are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds.

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

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

Renge, the lotus flower, symbolizes the wonder of this Law. Once you realize that your own life is the Mystic Law, you will realize that so are the lives of all others. That realization is the mystic *kyo*, or sutra. It is the king of sutras, the direct path to enlightenment, for it explains that the entity of our minds, from which spring both good and evil, is in fact the entity of the Mystic Law. If you have deep faith in this truth and chant Myoho-renge-kyo, you are certain to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. That is why the sutra states, "After my death, you must embrace this sutra. Those who do so shall travel the straight road to Buddhahood." Never doubt in the slightest, but keep your faith and attain enlightenment in this lifetime. Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

1255 Toki Jonin



²⁸ The Buddha's name –as used here means Namu-myoho-renge-kyo