

THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

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THE TRUTH ABOUT NAMUMYŌHŌRENGEKYŌ

Reverend Raidō Hirota
International Meeting
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QUESTION: I was reading recently that before the Daishonin ¹ proclaimed *Namumyōhōrengekyō* ² to have the full essence of the Law, that *Namumyōhōrengekyō* along with other forms of Daimoku praising Amida Buddha ³, Shakyamuni Buddha ⁴ and others were used by the temples he studied at. What was revolutionary according to the non-Buddhist western author I was reading was that he identified the Daimoku we use, and was already in use, as the only focus we needed (along with Gongyo⁵). Is this an accurate description of how the Daishonin first encountered

¹ Daishonin – Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282), the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

² Namumyōhōrengekyō – Odaimoku, or the title of the Lotus Sutra as pronounced in Japanese that is the chant of many Buddhist sects.

³ Amida Buddha - Infinite Life or Infinite Light Buddha who is said to reside in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the Western region of the universe.

⁴ Shakyamuni Buddha - Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE-949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism on this earth.

⁵ Gongyo - the practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which entails the morning and evening recitation of the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō.

***Namumyōhōrengekyō*? The narrative I was told in Nichiren Shoshu⁶ was Nichiren was the first to speak the O'Daimoku we chant today.**

RH: *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra*, the Sanskrit title of the Lotus Sutra⁷ was translated into Chinese as 妙法蓮華經 (*Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*) in 406 C.E. by Kumarajiva⁸. (Kumarajiva's translation is the one preferred by Nichiren Daishonin.) The Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters (*kanji* characters) of Kumarajiva's translation is *MyōhōRengeKyō*. Thus, the Japanese title of the Lotus Sutra is *MyōhōRengeKyō*. *Myōhōrengekyō* is also the contents of the Lotus Sutra. But within the Lotus Sutra there is no phrase that includes *Namu*. *Namu* means *kimyo*, meaning "return your life to *Myoho*." This means believing in *Myōhōrengekyō* with your whole life, or believing in *Myōhōrengekyō* as though it is your life itself. This is the central teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The entire Lotus Sutra is concentrated in this one phrase: *Myōhōrengekyō*. By adding *Namu* implies "I believe in the Mystic Law." But as I said, *Namu* does not appear in the Lotus Sutra.

Namumyōhōrengekyō was not created or discovered by Nichiren Daishonin. As the Lotus Sutra was brought to Japan as early as the 6th or 7th century C.E. (or perhaps before), there were people who believed in the Lotus Sutra before Nichiren, who was born in the 13th century. Nevertheless, Nichiren Daishonin was the first to have faith in and practice the Lotus Sutra exclusively. In the various temples where he had studied from childhood as an acolyte until he declared his own religion, the priests and parishioners believed in the Lotus Sutra along with Amida Buddha, chanted *Namuamidabutsu*, *Namumyōhōrengekyō* and practiced many other cultural rituals of the time. Based on all he had learned through his rigorous studies Nichiren Daishonin, at the age of 32, chose to center his faith on chanting *Namumyōhōrengekyō*.

There are some people who chant *Namumyōhōrengekyō* for everything. There are others who believe in Shakyamuni, respect Shakyamuni and have Shakyamuni as their object of worship while chanting *Namumyōhōrengekyō* to his statue. Nichiren Shu, the Minobu sect⁹ is one of those sects that consider Shakyamuni as the Buddha, and believe

⁶ 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.

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

⁸ Kumarajiva – (344-413) an Indian Buddhist monk and scholar who, as a child, traveled with his mother around India and other nations to study Buddhism. Because of his renown as a Mahayana scholar fluent in Chinese he was evidentially given the position of Teacher of the Nation in the Chinese capital of Ch'ang-an where he committed himself to translating Buddhist scriptures, including the Lotus Sutra, into Chinese.

⁹ Minobu sect – Nichiren Shu - the Nichiren sect that has its head temple in Kuon-ji at Minobu, which views Shakyamuni as the true Buddha.

that because *Myōhōrengekyō* was taught by Shakyamuni then it is very important. They set Shakyamuni, not the Law, as the center of faith and chant *Namumyōhōrengekyō*. The Minobu sect also separates their daimoku with a space between *Namu* and *Myōhōrengekyō*; chanting, *N a m u – Myōhōrengekyō N a m u – Myōhōrengekyō*, so that it is not a single phrase or one unit. This is their traditional way of chanting daimoku.

Nichiren Daishonin considered Odaimoku as one phrase – one word. *Namu* is a part of the whole. We pronounce it in as even a rhythm as possible, letting the sound flow uninterrupted.

*NanmyōhōrengekyōNanmyōhōrengekyōNanmyōhōrengekyō*¹⁰

The greatest number of Buddhists in Japan are those who chant *Namumyōhōrengekyō*. The reason for this is that after the advent of Nichiren Daishonin, small groups of people began chanting *Namumyōhōrengekyō* while affixing their own beliefs, or what they thought were Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, to their reason and purpose for chanting the Odaimoku. They separated into different groups, with each interpreting Nichiren's teachings in their own way. How we chant *Namumyōhōrengekyō*, however, and how others chant *Namumyōhōrengekyō* may sound exactly the same, but our beliefs and the beliefs of other groups are different. While we believe that Nichiren Daishonin is the Buddha of this age, and the Law of *Myōhōrengekyō* is the center of our faith, others put Shakyamuni as the center when they chant. Therefore, even though the Odaimoku sounds the same, if the belief is different, we are not supposed to chant together.

Namumyōhōrengekyō chanted by Nichiren Daishonin was not created by Nichiren Daishonin or originate with him. Despite what some say, Nichiren Daishonin was not the first to chant *Namumyōhōrengekyō*. Nichiren said that the *Mappo* era¹¹, which began 2000 years after the passing of Shakyamuni, is different than the era in which Shakyamuni lived and was Buddha. During Shakyamuni's time the people were more simple in their development, the conditions were different, and Shakyamuni was the true Buddha for that time. During this time of *Mappo*, the so called evil age, requires a different Buddha. Nichiren Daishonin, who understood that the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* is the center and the appropriate and correct belief for this time, is the True Buddha of this age. In this era, to chant and put Shakyamuni as the center of belief has no meaning.

¹⁰ *Nanmyōhōrengekyō* – *Nan* is the correct pronunciation of the Odaimoku when chanting because it easily flows off the tongue.

¹¹ *Mappo* era – 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.

QUESTION: We were always taught in SGI¹² and Taisekiji¹³ that on April 28, 1253 Nichiren Daishonin chanted *Namumyōhōrengekyō* for the first time and introduced *Namumyōhōrengekyō* to the world. It sounds to me that that is not true.

RH: Nichiren Daishonin left home to become a priest at the age of 12. For 16 years he trained to become a priest. He visited every Buddhist sect, group and temple, and studied and practiced the teachings of each group without prejudice. He simply wanted to learn and understand the substance of the original doctrine and teachings, and the underlying principle or law of each group's belief without trying to interpret what it was. What he was in search of was the basic Buddhist principle that all lives – human and non-human; sentient and insentient – are equal and each life possesses the life of Buddha. Nichiren was searching for that sect of Buddhism that taught this basic principle, and searching for the Law itself. He persisted for 16 years in this rigorous pursuit and training. Finally, he came to realize that the Lotus Sutra was the only teaching that expounded this principle. It was on April 28, 1253 that Nichiren Daishonin announced his findings and his commitment to live as a believer and practitioner of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* exclusively, and as a priest, to teach *Namumyōhōrengekyō* to others. He made the solemn oath publicly on this date. April 28, 1253.

Believers, in each of your countries, there are other people who chant *Namumyōhōrengekyō*. You might be tempted to chant with them because they are chanting the same way as you. But I want you to understand that that is not what you are supposed to do. Do not make the easy decision to chant together with others who may chant the same daimoku but have a different belief and understanding.



¹² SGI – Soka Gakkai International, a lay organization that wrongly incorporates some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism into its own philosophy and practice.

¹³ Taisekiji - - the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu and its organization.

THERE IS ONLY ONE SUMMIT

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

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QUESTION: I had thought that Zen¹⁴ and other sects the Daishonin had refuted were much older than the Buddhism he espoused. Another book I was reading said that most of these sects were founded within a 20-year period of time, and were almost all based on the Lotus Sutra. Aside from their worshiping Shakyamuni as the focus of their faith, can you tell us how they have perverted the meaning of the Lotus Sutra, or what major teachings they have which makes their teachings heretical?



RH: Shakyamuni taught long sutras and short sutras. It is said that he taught over 84,000 sutras during his lifetime. There are many Buddhas, but Shakyamuni was the most prominent among all of them. Within 83,999 sutras of the 84,000 sutras, Shakyamuni did not once teach that all lives are equal and all lives can attain enlightenment. The Lotus Sutra is like the summit of a mountain. A mountain has only one summit. For Shakyamuni, the Lotus Sutra, taught during the last 8

years of his life, is that summit. The 83,999 other sutras are below the summit. These sutras were taught as preparation to teach the highest teaching at the end of his life. These were the provisional teachings used to cultivate the minds of people, and to create an environment to allow the people to better understand the teaching at the summit. 83,999 teachings were the arrow pointing to the peak of the mountain where the Lotus Sutra exists. When Shakyamuni taught the highest teaching, he instructed everyone to discard all his previous teachings and only believe in the Lotus Sutra because none of the prior teachings taught the truth, which is that all lives are equal and can become enlightened. This is the main teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

In the Lotus Sutra Shakyamuni states that during the 2000 years following his death, out of respect, many people will keep me as the center of their faith. But after those 2000 years have passed there will be no meaning and no purpose to keep me as

¹⁴ Zen – a Buddhist sect that believes enlightenment is achieved through perception of one’s own mind through meditation.

the center of faith because I became the Buddha Shakyamuni by studying and practicing the unsurpassed True Law, which is that all lives are equal, and all lives can attain Buddhahood. To teach this Law I have preached this sutra of the Wonderful Law – the Lotus Sutra. This means, worshipping me will not make you a Buddha. But by worshipping this wonderful Law alone, you will achieve Buddhahood. Thus after 2000 years after Shakyamuni died, he should not be the object of worship and the center of faith. Everyone must put the Lotus Sutra as the center of faith. It is the only way to become Buddha. This is what Shakyamuni taught in the Lotus Sutra.

Mappo (the Latter Day of the Law) arrived 2000 years after the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha. Rather than following exactly what Shakyamuni taught, people of this era had decided to adopt a superficial interpretation of Shakyamuni's teachings, and started to look for different teachings, different beliefs, and different modes of worship. Many built statues of Amida Buddha, Dainichi Buddha¹⁵, etc., and developed sects centered around these various Buddhas. For instance, the Shingon sect¹⁶ worships Dainichi Buddha; Nembutsu sect¹⁷ worships Amida Buddha and aspires to have rebirth in the Pure Land where Amida Buddha lives. As you can see, people started to search for teachings other than the teachings of Shakyamuni. They believed that because the teachings were different from what Shakyamuni had taught, their teachings were good. All kinds of religious groups unrelated to Shakyamuni popped up everywhere.

Nichiren Daishonin was born 170 years after the start of the *Mappo* era. This is the time when all of these new religions started to emerge. People were searching for alternative beliefs to Shakyamuni. Buddhism splintered in many different directions. At that time, Japan thought Zen was a good teaching to follow because at the time Zen was very popular in China. The Japanese felt that Zen's popularity in China was a guarantee of its reliability. Hence, Zen was imported to Japan by Japanese who had traveled to China. Since the mindset of the *Mappo* era was to search for the right religion, Zen looked like a good bet.

What Nichiren Daishonin understood from his exhaustive studies was that we were not supposed to worship Shakyamuni or any Buddha. We were not supposed to discard everything that Shakyamuni taught because there was some truth among Shakyamuni's other teachings. Nichiren Daishonin pursued a correct understanding of the main teachings of Shakyamuni. Instead of putting Shakyamuni in the center, he

¹⁵ Dainichi Buddha - (Great Sun) a Buddha of the esoteric teachings who, it is said, is always in this world teaching the law. He is also regarded as the source from which all other Buddhas and bodhisattvas spring.

¹⁶ Shingon sect - teachings based on the teachings of Dainichi Buddha.

¹⁷ Nembutsu sect – the Pure Land sect that believes in Amida Buddha and chanting *Namuamidabutsu*. Pure Land sect asserts that by chanting this phrase, one can attain rebirth in Amida Buddha's Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the west.

wanted to learn what Shakyamuni had learned. In order to do this, he realized one has to put *Namumyōhōrengekyō* in the center of faith. This was Nichiren Daishonin's interpretation of what Shakyamuni wanted people to do in the age of *Mappo*.

The *Mappo* era began in 1052 C.E. during the Heian period. Nichiren was born in 1222, during the Kamakura period, 170 years after the start of *Mappo*, or 2170 after the death of Shakyamuni. Of the many sutras preached by Shakyamuni that Nichiren studied, he found a passage in the Lotus Sutra that states, in the fifth five hundred years after Shakyamuni's passing, Bodhisattva Jōgyō¹⁸ would appear. A bodhisattva is one who is practicing to become a Buddha while teachings others and leading them to Buddhahood. In Chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni transfers this sutra to Bodhisattva Jōgyō and makes him promise to appear in the *Mappo* era to teach the correct teaching to all people anywhere. This chapter reads in part:

After the Tathagata is extinct [such a one]
Knowing [this] sutra that the Buddha has taught
[Together with] its reasoning and process,
Shall expound it according to its true meaning.
Just as the light of the sun and moon
Can dispel the darkness,
So this man, working in the world,
Can disperse the gloom of the living
And cause numberless bodhisattvas
Finally to abide in the One-vehicle.¹⁹²⁰

Shakyamuni is saying that in the time of the *Mappo era*, this person has to be the one who has to teach people that they have to believe in the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* and not in Shakyamuni.

During his course of study and investigation, Nichiren Daishonin began asking himself who is Bodhisattva Jōgyō. This is now the time of *Mappo*. No person with that name has appeared. Who has taken on the responsibility to teach the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō*? Nichiren kept asking and searching for Jōgyō. He thought if he could study and learn from Bodhisattva Jōgyō, he could attain Buddhahood. But Bodhisattva Jōgyō was elusive. Nichiren could not find him or determine who he was.

¹⁸ Bodhisattva Jōgyō – one of the Four Bodhisattvas and the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth which appear in the 15th (Yujutsu) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The four bodhisattvas represent the four virtues of the Buddha's life: true self, eternity, purity and happiness. Jōgyō represents the virtue of true self.

¹⁹ *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Chapter 21, "The Devine Power of the Tathagata", page 300, Weatherhill / Kosei, New York, Tokyo,

²⁰ The One vehicle – the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō*.

Still, it became evermore clear to Nichiren that the primary teaching of the Lotus Sutra was to worship the Law of the Lotus Sutra – *Myōhōrengekyō*. That was the only way for people to become enlightened. And since he had this clear realization, he thought that even though he was not Jōgyō, he could prepare the way for Jōgyō by teaching and creating an environment for people of the world to easily learn these teachings.



Nichiren Daishonin

When Nichiren Daishonin embarked on this course of transmission of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra exclusively, the Kamakura Shogunate government set out to persecute him. This caused Nichiren to begin to think that perhaps he was the one who was actualizing the mission of Bodhisattva Jōgyō, and that he should take full responsibility to teach the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* to believers. Of course, the persecution by the government against him intensified. Finally, in the aftermath of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution in 1271, when the Kamakura government attempted, but failed, to behead him, Nichiren realized that he indeed was Bodhisattva Jōgyō. In his mind he perceived that, “I am Buddha, and I am teaching the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō*.” It was upon that realization in 1271 that he first actualized the Law in the form of the Gohonzon²¹, the true object of worship.

Nichiren opposed Zen, Shingon, Nembutsu and other sects because you cannot attain Buddhahood through those teachings.



²¹ Gohonzon - - the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which represents the universal Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* and the Buddha nature in all things.

ON CONSECRATION & STATUES

Reverend Raidō Hirota

Quakertown, Pennsylvania

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& July 13'14, 2022

QUESTION: In the Goshō "Consecrating an Image of Shakyamuni Buddha Made by Shijo Kingo²²" Nichiren Daishonin refers to the statue sculpted by Shijo Kingo as a "living Buddha." Could you please explain the concept of "Living Buddha"? Is it directly related to the *Kaigen* (consecration) ceremony Nichiren performed for this sculpture and objects of worship? Or did Nichiren Daishonin mean something else?

Reverend Raidō Hirota (RH): Early in his career, Nichiren Daishonin thought of the statue of Shakyamuni and the Lotus Sutra as objects of worship. He placed both on his altar and prayed, reciting the Lotus Sutra. In time, he came to understand that they were insufficient objects to deliver the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō to the people. He also recognized that having come so close to being executed by the government at Tatsunokuchi in 1271, afforded him the insight to perceive the true meaning at the center of the Lotus Sutra. And it was at that moment that he committed himself to being a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra until the day he died.

There are all kinds of Buddhist sects, many of which worship statues of the Buddha, Shakyamuni. When Nichiren Daishonin prayed to a statue of Shakyamuni and the Lotus Sutras as objects of worship, he did not do it to worship Shakyamuni. Rather, he did it out of respect for Shakyamuni for having taught the Lotus Sutra. Yet, when others observed Daishonin, they did not know what was in his mind and thought that he was worshipping Shakyamuni. Nonetheless, Nichiren Daishonin understood that Shakyamuni understood that the heart of the Lotus Sutra is the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. By just worshipping a statue, the real meaning of Namumyōhōrengekyō, and each individual word or character of Namumyōhōrengekyō cannot be conveyed. That is why Nichiren Daishonin chose to express the meaning of Namumyōhōrengekyō using *kanji* characters – words – as the object of worship.

²² Shijo Kingo – (1230-1300) Shijo Nakatsukasa Sabura Zaemon-no-jo Yorimoto, a samurai and devout believer, who converted to Nichiren Daishonin's teachings in or about 1256.

Even though a statue resembles a human being in appearance, Shakyamuni was not learning and practicing as a statue. The reason Shakyamuni became a Buddha is because he had studied and practiced the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō long ago while he was an ordinary human being. He was learning and practicing as a living person. That is why Nichiren Daishonin referred to Shakyamuni as a “living Buddha.”

There were so many groups and individuals who made and prayed to statues. That is why Nichiren Daishonin said to Shijo Kingo that if you carve a statue and pray to it without giving it a soul, it is not going to be an object of worship for the faith of the Lotus Sutra. It would be like objects of worship of other sects such as Zen, Nembutsu and the like that worship statues of Shakyamuni. What Nichiren Daishonin wrote was a warning: worshipping a statue without the soul of the Law, is worshipping something that is not an object of worship of the Lotus Sutra.

After Nichiren began inscribing Gohonzons, he continued to put a statue of Shakyamuni, and the scrolls of the Lotus Sutra on the altar and chanted. However, when he was about to die, he instructed his disciples to throw away his little statue of Shakyamuni somewhere near his grave so that the elements – wind, rain, snow – would eventually destroy it. He then told his disciples and followers to make sure to never place any statue in front of the Gohonzon when they prayed. The reason for his admonition was to avoid confusion as to what we should pray to and have faith in. It is the Law, exclusively.

Before he passed away, Nichiren Daishonin appointed six senior priests, whom he trusted, to carry on his faith. He felt these priests had a deep understanding of the Law of Buddhism. Among these senior priests was one named Nichirō (1245-1320). Even though Nichiren had instructed his disciples to leave his statue of Shakyamuni out in the elements near his grave, it made Nichirō so uncomfortable that he retrieved it and brought it to the temple, placed it on the altar and prayed to it. Nichirō's actions were exactly what Nichiren Daishonin had warned against. While Nichirō justified his actions as feeling so distressed by seeing the statue abandoned with such disregard, he felt, despite Nichiren Daishonin's request, he had to rescue it. Even so, because the statue belonged to Nichiren, and Nichiren gave his instruction as what to do with it, Nichirō in effect had stolen the statue.

Among the other five senior priests, four agreed with Nichirō and followed suit. They felt if Nichiren Daishonin chanted with a statue of Shakyamuni on the altar, they would do the same. Thus, five of the senior priests established the practice of placing statues in front of Gohonzon. This is not what Nichiren Daishonin instructed. These five priests had, in effect, regressed.

Nikko Shonin was the only priest among the six senior priests to precisely follow what Nichiren Daishonin had instructed.

Question: Did Shijo Kingo consecrate the statue, or did Nichiren, Daishonin consecrate it?

RH: This goshō is telling Shijo Kingo that when you do a consecration ceremony you have to chant the Lotus Sutra, otherwise the object will not be an object of worship. Shijo Kingo didn't actually carve the statue himself. He had a sculptor carve it. At the time this goshō was written, Nichiren Daishonin was living at Minobu. He did not leave the mountain. And there wasn't the transportation system we have today, So, it would have been difficult for anyone to make frequent trips to Minobu to see Nichiren. Therefore, Nichiren was instructing Shijo Kingo on how to do a consecration ceremony.

When making a wooden statue, the piece of wood is shaved, turned upside down, spun around, and sometimes even dropped or banged. It is just a piece of wood having all kinds of things happen to. It does not become a statue of the Buddha until the work is complete. And it does not become an object of worship until it has an "eye opening ceremony" or consecration. This letter is reminding Shijo Kingo that the "eye opening ceremony" is performed by chanting the Lotus Sutra, and if the statue does not have this ceremony with the Lotus Sutra, it will be merely be a statue like those of any other Buddhist sect.

You may think I am not addressing your question directly. But your question is so important. That is why I am trying to explain this issue on a much deeper level.

Among the six senior priests chosen by Nichiren Daishonin to spread his teachings, five returned to worshipping a statue of Shakyamuni. Nikko Shonin was the only senior priest to stand firm and hold on to the teachings as Nichiren had taught them. He was able to do this because he had lived with Nichiren Daishonin to the very end and, therefore knew Nichiren well.

Nichiren said that Shakyamuni was enlightened by the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Shakyamuni himself said he was enlightened by the Law of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, if you worship the statue of Shakyamuni, you will not understand that you are to worship the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. It is for that reason that Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon – the true object of worship: to express or depict the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō in words or letters (*kanji characters*).

Other Buddhist sects assert that they worship Shakyamuni because he taught the Lotus Sutra. The difference in understanding is great. The Lotus Sutra is the Law that Shakyamuni had learned and practiced. So, when you worship a statue, you are

unaware of, or you are obscuring the true object of worship. The most important thing is to clearly place the Law of Namumyōhōrengkyō in the center.

Nikko Shonin made a statue, or *Omiesama*²³, of Nichiren Daishonin. In Nichiren Shoshu, the statues of Nichiren Daishonin are *haragomori* statues, meaning hollow on the inside. *Hara* means “stomach.” *Gomori* means “keep inside like a safe.” In other words, the head of the statue can be removed, and inside the torso is a hollow for storing a Gohonzon. The Gohonzon cannot be seen from the outside, but in Nichiren Shoshu, every statue of Nichiren Daishonin has a Gohonzon inside. Nikko placed his statue of Nichiren Daishonin on the altar to remind himself that Nichiren taught us to put the Law at the center, and that Buddha is itself the Law of Namumyōhōrengkyō. Nikko made this statue to emphasize and celebrate this ultimate truth. However, not all Nichiren Shoshu priests have statues of Nichiren Daishonin on their altars. Most only have Gohonzon. But the tradition of having a statue of Nichiren Daishonin began with Nikko Shonin.



Question: Does having Nichiren Daishonin’s statue on the altar represent *ninpo ikka*²⁴, the oneness of the person and the Law?

RH: Yes. That is exactly right. Namumyōhōrengkyō is written down the middle of Gohonzon, and below it is written *Nichiren*. (Of course, all in *kanji* characters.) That implies *ninpo ikka* (the oneness of the person and the Law). Putting Nichiren’s statue on the altar with Gohonzon inside, expresses *ninpo ikka* in a different dimension.

The statues of Shakyamuni Buddha and other Buddhas and bodhisattvas are perfectly modeled and ready to be worshipped. The *Omiesamas* of Nichiren Daishonin are not created to be worshipped. These statues are not the static body of Nichiren. They are Nichiren holding and reading an open scroll of the Lotus Sutra. They depict Nichiren practicing, praying and having faith. These statues of Nichiren Daishonin are not telling us “worship me because I am enlightened and understand everything.” They are showing us what Nichiren Daishonin did. The *omiesama* of Nichiren is to be used as a reminder of how we should conduct ourselves by practicing, praying, and studying the Lotus Sutra. They act as a model for all believers.

The sculptors who carve statues for a living, will make anything they are commissioned to make – Amida Buddha, Dainichi Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha,

²³ Omiesama – honorable Buddhist statue

²⁴ Ninpo ikka – oneness of the person and the Law

Bodhisattva Kannon²⁵, etc. – following the traditional designs of how these figures are supposed to look. But I wondered if it is right to commission a statute of Nichiren Daishonin for our temple from someone who will make anything for money. And when you ask others to create what you want, sometimes the result is not what you imagined, or wished for. So, I thought the most important thing was that a person who had correct faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō should be the one to create a sculpture of Nichiren Daishonin. As I am a believer, if I made a sculpture it would reflect my faith. And since I am not making any other sculptures or statues, secular figures or any figures representing any other faith, I decided to make an *Omiesama* of Nichiren Daishonin for our temple. I searched through all the images of Nichiren Daishonin, and all the images of statues of Nichiren Daishonin and chose to create a statue based on one image I liked, and applied some modifications. This is the *Omiesama* that is in our temple.

Question: What happened to Nichizon who went to Kyoto where he worshipped statues of Shakyamuni?

RH: After Nichiren Daishonin passed away, the Kamakura government, in the same way as they did when Nichiren Daishonin was alive, started to persecute many of Nichiren's believers. If you had faith in Nichiren's teachings, you would be attacked by the government. Believers lost their jobs, which made survival very difficult. It was a very bad situation.

Nichiren Daishonin was not the type of person who micro-managed everything. He wasn't the type to check on everything, or be in charge of everything. He didn't choose one person to which he transferred all the teachings. He was not like that. He taught all his disciples in an equal manner. He didn't show favoritism. He chose six senior priests who appeared to have good faith, good practice and good scholastic ability. Nichiren felt the six priests he chose – Nissho, Nichiro, Nikko, Niko, Nitcho and Nichiji – had the ability to assume responsibility to pass on his teachings to the people since each of these priests had demonstrated that they had good faith. Each came from different parts of Japan, which was another criterion for Nichiren having selected them, so that they could return to their home province and spread the correct teachings to the people of their region. Nichiren believed those six priests would spread the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō all over Japan.

After Nichiren Daishonin passed away, the government's attacks against the priests intensified. Nichiren was gone, so the priests had no support, or no one to back

²⁵ Bodhisattva Kannon - also Kanzeon – a bodhisattva who pledged to assume 32 different forms and appear anywhere in the world to save people from danger or suffering.

them up. Among the six senior priests, five of them, realizing their lives were in danger, decided to modify the teachings by mixing the teachings of other sects with the teachings of Nichiren, just so they could survive. Each of these five priests formed their own, independent groups and told their believers that Nichiren had chosen them as his primary disciple. Each one boasted that they were the favored and most important disciples of Nichiren Daishonin. However, they also realized that if they taught the same teachings as Nichiren, and taught that Nichiren Daishonin was the Buddha, it would not be very popular with believers, and their congregations would not grow. This is another reason these five priests reinstated their old belief that Shakyamuni was Buddha, and the center of faith. This became the core teaching of the Minobu sect.

Of the original six senior priests, Nikko Shonin²⁶ was the only one to admonish them, telling them that they could not reinstate Shakyamuni as the center of faith because it was not what Nichiren Daishonin had taught. Nikko Shonin insisted that the purity of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings had to be safeguarded. Nikko was the one who taught that the Buddha of the *Mappo* era is Nichiren Daishonin, and the Law of *Namumyōhōrengekyō* is the center of faith.

Nichizon (1265-1345) was converted to Nichiren's teachings by Nichimoku Shonin, and later became a disciple of Nikko Shonin. In 1299, Nichizon was excommunicated by Nikko Shonin for having been distracted during a lecture. To repent, Nichizon dedicated himself to traveling around Japan for 12 years propagating the teachings and building a total of 36 temples. As of result of his display of repentance, Nikko Shonin reinstated him.

In 1333, after the death of Nikko Shonin, he and Nichigo²⁷ accompanied Nichimoku Shonin²⁸ to Kyoto to remonstrate with the imperial court. En route, Nichimoku Shonin fell ill and died. Nichizon and Nichigo continued on to Kyoto. And as you mentioned, Nichizon relocated to Kyoto and settled at Yoboji temple, which he had originally established in 1308 during his repentance tour building temples around the country. There he erected a statue of Shakyamuni which he worshiped.

At one point in its history, Taisekiji could no longer manage financially and fell into bankruptcy. Because communication was poor and not what it is today, priests of Taisekiji were unaware of what was going on at Yoboji. But because Nichizon was the

²⁶ Nikko Shonin - Byakuren Ajari Nikko Shonin (1246-1333) – 2nd High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who received the transfer of the teachings directly from Nichiren Daishonin.

²⁷ Nichigo – (1293-1353) – one of the six new disciples of Nikko Shonin. Nichigo returned to Taisekiji with Nichimoku Shonin's ashes. Nichigo had a dispute with Nichido Shonin, Nichimoku Shonin's successor. Nichigo insisted that Nichimoku had bequeathed to him Renzo-bo lodging at Taisekiji. When Nichigo did not receive the property, he left Taisekiji and built Myohon-ji temple in Yoshihama in Awa Province.

²⁸ Nichimoku Shonin - Niidakyo Ajari Nichimoku (1260-1333) – 3rd High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who inherited the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin from Nikko Shonin.

founder of Yoboji and had been a disciple of Nikko Shonin, priests at Taisekiji requested help from Yoboji, inviting the priests of Yoboji to come to Taisekiji; which they did. At the time, the priests of Taisekiji did not realize that what had arrived from Kyoto was a Trojan horse. For the priests of Yoboji ushered in an era of worshipping statues of Shakyamuni at Taisekiji – Nichimoku’s temple – which lasted for 100 years and caused all kinds of confusion and disruption.

THE INNER & OUTER WAYS

Reverend Raido Hirota

Quakertown, Pennsylvania

July 28, 2019

QUESTION: In the “Opening of the Eyes” Gosho (*Kaimoku Sho*) Nichiren Daishonin wrote, “All scriptures, or teachings, from whatever source, are ultimately the revelation of Buddhist truth. They are not non-Buddhist teachings.” What was the meaning of this passage during Nichiren Daishonin’s time? And what is the meaning now?

RH: This question concerns *nai i ge sōtai* or the relationship of the inner and outer Ways. *Sōtai* means “relation” or “relative.” *Nai* means “inner.” *Ge* means “outer.”

Nai – inner – refers to Buddhism. *Ge* – outer – refers to non-Buddhist religions. The objective of Buddhism is to be enlightened. Non-Buddhist religions have a moral or ethical objective or focus. For example, Confucianism and Taoism from China teach how to respect others as human beings and how to behave in society and live in harmony.



相对, *Sōtai*, means “relative” or “relation.” The two kanji characters that form this word seem to be challenging each other to figure out how to manage the relationship. That is the image these characters 相对 project. But the meaning *sōtai* in Buddhism is somewhat different than the Japanese language definition of relative and relation. In Buddhism the meaning is more like the *Matryoshka* doll – the stacking or nesting dolls of Russia. There is one large doll with

multiple dolls of decreasing sizes inside it. The largest doll is the teaching of Buddhism.

Inside this doll are all other religions. This does not mean that Buddhism is mounting a conflict against other religions. It means that Buddhism is embracing all that is inside. This includes the teachings of ethics and morality and all else. It does not rank the religions or declare that Buddhism is the most important. It is embracing all inside. That is what the passage in the *Kaimoku Sho* means. The *Kaimoku Sho* is about the “opening of the eyes” (consecration), which we discussed earlier.

Oeshiki

October 13, 1282



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

Oeshiki, or “Founder’s Day” is a celebration of Daishonin’s true, eternal Law, which was revealed through his endurance of the austere practices and persecutions described in the Lotus Sutra. Though the Daishonin died, the Buddha nature – the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō itself – never dies; it is eternal. That is why we celebrate *Oeshiki*, to affirm the eternal life of the Buddha.

Oeshiki is also an affirmation of the treatise “Rissho Ankoku Ron”²⁹. In this treatise Nichiren Daishonin makes clear that we must practice the Mystic Law and perceive enlightenment for ourselves, and also warns that we must believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō, or we will never achieve peace.

²⁹ Rissho Ankoku Ron – “On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism.”

You should make paper cherry blossoms and decorate the left and right sides of the Gohonzon, specifically because even though Nichiren Daishōnin died in autumn—the 13th day of the 10th month—the cherry blossoms bloomed throughout the country. The lotus flower symbolizes the teachings of Shakyamuni of India; after 2000 years during the Latter Day of the Law Buddhism came to Japan where the essence of Buddhism was elucidated by Nichiren Daishōnin. The cherry blossom symbolizes the passage of true Buddhism to Japan.

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

GOSHO SELECTION

EXCERPTS

THE SELECTION OF THE TIME³⁰

....

Question: When is the time for the preaching of the Hinayana sutras and the provisional sutras, and when is the time for the preaching of the Lotus Sutra?

....

Answer: In the Daijuku Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha, the World-Honored One, addresses Bodhisattva Gatsuzo and predicts the future. Thus he says that the first five hundred years after his passing will be the age of enlightenment,³¹ and the next five hundred years, the age of meditation³² (making one thousand years). The next five hundred years will be the age of reading, reciting and listening,³³ and the next five hundred years, the age of building temples and stupas³⁴ (making two thousand years).

³⁰ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 3, pp 84-93.

³¹ Age of enlightenment: The period when many people are sure to attain enlightenment through practicing the Buddha's teachings.

³² Age of meditation: The period during which people will widely practice meditation in order to perceive the truth.

³³ Age of reading, reciting and listening: The period when studying and reciting the sutras and receiving lectures on them constitute the central practice.

³⁴ Age of building temples and stupas: The period when many temples and stupas are built.

Concerning the next five hundred years³⁵ after that, he says, "Quarrels and disputes will arise among the adherents to my teachings, and the Pure Law will become obscured and lost."

These five five-hundred-year periods, which total twenty-five hundred years, are delineated in different ways by different people. The Meditation Master Tao-ch'o of China declares that during the first four of the five five-hundred-year periods, which constitute the Former and Middle Days of the Law, the Pure Law of the Hinayana and Mahayana teachings will flourish, but that after the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, these teachings will all perish. At that time, only those who practice the Pure Land teaching, the Pure Law of the Nembutsu, will be able to escape the sufferings of birth and death.³⁶

The Japanese priest Honen defines the situation in this way.³⁷ According to him, the Lotus, Kegon, Dainichi and various Hinayana sutras which have spread in Japan, along with the teachings of the Tendai, Shingon, Ritsu and other sects, constitute the Pure Law of the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law referred to in the passage from the Daijuku Sutra cited above. But once the world enters the Latter Day of the Law, all these teachings will be completely obliterated. Even though men should continue to practice such teachings, not a single one of them will succeed in escaping from the sufferings of birth and death. Thus Nagarjuna in his Jujubibasha Ron and the priest T'an-luan refer to such teachings as the "difficult-to-practice way";³⁸ Tao-ch'o declares that not a single person has ever attained enlightenment through them;³⁹ and Shan-tao says that not one person in a thousand can be saved by them.⁴⁰ After the Pure Law of these teachings has become obscured and lost, then the Great Pure Law--namely, the three Pure Land sutras⁴¹ and the single practice of calling upon the name of Amida Buddha--will make its appearance, and when people devote

³⁵ This period refers to the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. The last of the five five-hundred-year periods, which is called the age of conflict.

³⁶ These remarks are found in Tao-ch'o's Anraku Shu.

³⁷ This explanation appears in Honen's work Senchaku Shu.

³⁸ Difficult-to-practice way: Together with the "easy-to-practice way," one of two ways of Buddhist practice mentioned in the Jujubibasha Ron. The difficult-to-practice way means the exertion of strenuous effort in austere practices for countless aeons in order to attain enlightenment. The Pure Land school interprets the difficult-to-practice way as the practice of any sutra other than its three basic sutras (the Amida, Muryoju and Kammuryoju sutras). In contrast, the "easy-to-practice way" means to call upon the names of Buddhas, relying upon their power of salvation to attain enlightenment. The Igyo (Easy Practice) chapter of the Jujubibasha Ron emphasizes salvation by the power of Amida Buddha, saying that one can be reborn in the Pure Land by calling on this Buddha's name. T'an-luan also adopted this classification in his work Ojo Ron Chu. However, Nagarjuna's intention was not to deny the benefit of the difficult-to-practice way but to set forth the easy-to-practice way as a temporary expedient for those lacking courage to persevere in the Buddhist practice. In other words, the Jujubibasha Ron presents the easy-to-practice way, or calling upon the name of Amida or other Buddhas, as a means, and the difficult-to-practice way as the essential and fundamental practice leading to Buddhahood.

³⁹ This statement appears in the Anraku Shu.

⁴⁰ This statement appears in the Ojo Raisan.

⁴¹ Three Pure Land sutras: The Muryoju, Kammuryoju and Amida sutras.

themselves to this practice, even though they may be evil or ignorant persons, "If there are ten of them, then all ten will be reborn in the Pure Land, and if there are a hundred of them, then all hundred will be reborn there."⁴² This is the meaning of the passage: "Only the single doctrine of the Pure Land constitutes the road that leads to salvation."⁴³

Honen therefore declares that if men desire happiness in the next life, they should withdraw their support from Mount Hiei, To-ji, Onjo-ji and the seven major temples of Nara,⁴⁴ as well as from all the various temples and monasteries throughout the islands of Japan, and should seize all the fields and land holdings that have been donated to these temples and devote these resources to the building of Nembutsu halls. If they do so, they will be certain to be reborn in the Pure Land. Thus he urges them to recite the words *Namu Amida Butsu*.

It has now been more than fifty years since these teachings spread throughout our country. My refutation of these evil doctrines is now a thing of the past. There is no doubt that our present age corresponds to the fifth five-hundred-year period described in the *Daijuku Sutra*, when "the Pure Law will become obscured and lost." But that which is to come after "the Pure Law has become obscured and lost" is the Great Pure Law of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*, the heart and core of the Lotus Sutra. This is what should be propagated and spread throughout the continent of *Jambudvipa*--with its eighty thousand kingdoms, their eighty thousand rulers, and the ministers and countless subjects in the domain of each ruler--so that it may be chanted by all persons, just as the name of Amida is now chanted by the mouths of the monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen throughout Japan.

Question: What passages can you cite to prove this?

Answer: The seventh volume of the Lotus Sutra says, "In the fifth five hundred years after my death, accomplish worldwide *kosen-rufu* and never allow its flow to cease."⁴⁵ This indicates that "worldwide *kosen-rufu*" will be accomplished in the time after "the Pure Law becomes obscured and lost," as the *Daijuku Sutra* puts it.

Again, the sixth volume speaks of "one who is able to uphold this sutra in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law,"⁴⁶ and the fifth volume talks of "the latter age when the Law is on the point of disappearing."⁴⁷ The fourth volume states, "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even during the lifetime of the Buddha, how much

⁴² Ojo Raisan.

⁴³ Anraku Shu.

⁴⁴ Seven major temples of Nara: Principal temples of Buddhism in Nara, the capital of Japan during the Nara period (710-794). They are *Todai-ji*, *Kofuku-ji*, *Gango-ji*, *Daian-ji*, *Yakushi-ji*, *Saidai-ji* and *Horyu-ji*.

⁴⁵ Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

⁴⁶ Lotus Sutra, chap. 17

⁴⁷ Lotus Sutra, chap. 14

worse will it be in the world after his passing?"⁴⁸ And the fifth volume says, "The people will be full of hostility, and it will be extremely difficult to believe."⁴⁹ And the seventh volume, speaking of the fifth five-hundred-year period which is the age of conflict, says, "Do not allow the devil, the devil's people, or the deities, dragons, yakshas, kumbhandas⁵⁰ or their kind to seize the advantage."⁵¹

The Daijuku Sutra says, "Quarrels and disputes will arise among the adherents to my teachings." And the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra similarly says, "There will be monks in that evil age...", "Or there will be forest-dwelling monks...", and, "Demons will take possession of others..."⁵²

These passages describe the following situation. During the fifth five-hundred-year period, eminent priests who are possessed by demons will be found everywhere throughout the country. At that time, a single wise man⁵³ will appear. The eminent priests who are possessed by demons⁵⁴ will deceive the ruler, his ministers and the common people into slandering and abusing this man, attacking him with sticks, staves, tiles and stones, and condemning him to exile or death. At that time, Shakyamuni, Taho and the Buddhas of the ten directions will speak to the great bodhisattvas who sprang up from the earth, and the great bodhisattvas will in turn report to Bonten, Taishaku, the gods of the sun and moon, and the Four Heavenly Kings. As a result, strange occurrences and omens will appear in abundance in the heavens and on earth.

If the rulers of the various countries fail to heed this warning, then the Buddhas and the great bodhisattvas will order neighboring countries to censure those evil rulers and the evil priests of their countries. Then great struggles and disputes such as have never been known in the past will break out in the world.

At that time, all the people living in the four continents illuminated by the sun and moon, fearing the destruction of their nation or the loss of their lives, will pray to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas for help. And if there is no sign that their prayers will be answered, they will put their faith in this single humble priest whom they earlier

⁴⁸ Lotus Sutra, chap. 10

⁴⁹ Lotus Sutra, chap. 14

⁵⁰ Kumbhandas: Demons which drain human vitality.

⁵¹ Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

⁵² All three of these quotations appear in the twenty-line verse of the Kanji (13th) chapter, which details the three powerful enemies who will attack the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the evil latter age. The first quote comes from the passage, "There will be monks in that evil age with perverse views and hearts that are fawning and crooked who will say they have attained what they have not attained, being proud and boastful at heart"; the second, from the passage, "Or there will be forest-dwelling monks wearing clothing of patched rags and living in retirement who will claim they are practicing the true Way, despising and looking down on the rest of mankind"; and the third, from the passage, "In a muddied kalpa, in an evil age there will be many different things to fear. Demons will take possession of others and through them curse, revile and heap shame on us."

⁵³ Wise man: Nichiren Daishonin.

⁵⁴ A reference to Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple and Doryu of Kencho-ji, among others.

despised. Then all the countless eminent priests, the great rulers of the eighty thousand countries and the numberless common people will all bow their heads to the ground, press their palms together, and in one voice will chant Nan-myoho-renge-kyo. It will be like that occasion during the Buddha's demonstration of his ten mystic powers,⁵⁵ described in the Jinriki chapter of the Lotus Sutra, when all the beings in the worlds of the ten directions, without a single exception, turned toward the saha world and cried out together in a loud voice, Namu Shakyamuni Buddha, Namu Shakyamuni Buddha, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo!⁵⁶

Question: The sutra passages you have cited clearly prove your point. But are there any prophecies in the writings of T'ien-t'ai, Miao-lo or Dengyo that would support your argument?

....

Answer: I can see that you are very sincere and earnest in your questioning, so I will cite a few passages from the commentaries. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai states, "In the fifth five hundred years, the Mystic Way shall spread and benefit mankind far into the future."⁵⁷ The Great Teacher Miao-lo says, "The beginning of the Latter Day of the Law will not be without inconspicuous benefit."⁵⁸

The Great Teacher Dengyo declares, "The Former and Middle Days are almost over, and the Latter Day is near at hand. Now indeed is the time when the One Vehicle expounded in the Lotus Sutra will prove how perfectly it fits the capacities of all people. How do we know this is true? Because the Anrakugyo chapter of the Lotus Sutra states, 'In the latter age when the Law is on the point of disappearing, [the Lotus Sutra will be expounded far and wide].'"⁵⁹ And Dengyo further states, "The propagation of the true teaching will begin in the age when the Middle Day of the Law ends and the Latter Day opens, in a land to the east of T'ang and to the west of Katsu,⁶⁰ among people stained by the five impurities⁶¹ who live in a time of conflict. The sutra says, 'Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even during the lifetime of the Buddha, how much

⁵⁵ Ten mystic powers: Ten supernatural signs Shakyamuni Buddha displays in the Jinriki (21st) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, before specifically transferring the essence of the sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

⁵⁶ "All the beings ... cried out ... Namu Shakyamuni Buddha" refers to one of the Buddha's ten mystic powers and means that all the beings in the ten directions converted to the Buddha's teachings. Although the Lotus Sutra says that they cried "Namu Shakyamuni Buddha," it does not mention that they cried "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo." In so saying, Nichiren Daishonin interprets the conversion of all the beings as described in the Jinriki (21st) chapter to mean the conversion of all people in the Latter Day of the Law.

⁵⁷ Hokke Mongu, vol. 1.

⁵⁸ Hokke Mongu Ki, vol. 1. "Inconspicuous benefit" here indicates the benefit of the Mystic Law.

⁵⁹ Shugo Kokkai Sho.

⁶⁰ Katsu: An ancient kingdom extending from Manchuria to northern Korea. According to old maps, "a land to the east of T'ang and to the west of Katsu" would indicate Japan.

⁶¹ Five impurities: Also called the five defilements. Impurities of the age, of desire, of the people, of thought (or views) and of life itself. They are mentioned in the Hoben (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

worse will it be in the world after his passing?' There is good reason for this statement."⁶²

Shakyamuni Buddha was born in the Kalpa of Continuance,⁶³ in the ninth kalpa of decrease, when the span of human life was diminishing and measured a hundred years. The period when the span of human life diminishes from a hundred years to ten years accordingly falls within the period represented by the fifty years of the Buddha's preaching life, the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law that follow his passing, and the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law that follow that. During this period, the Lotus Sutra was destined to be propagated and spread widely on two occasions. The first was the last eight years of the Buddha's life [when he preached the Lotus Sutra], and the second is the five hundred years at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law.

T'ien-t'ai, Miao-lo and Dengyo were not born early enough to be present when the Buddha was in the world and preached the Lotus Sutra, nor were they born late enough to be present in the Latter Day of the Law. To their regret, they were born in the interval between these two times, and it is clear from their writings that they looked forward with longing to the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law.

Theirs was like the case of the hermit-sage Asita who, when he viewed the newborn Prince Siddhartha, the future Shakyamuni Buddha, remarked in sorrow, "I am already over ninety, so I will not live to see this prince attain enlightenment. After my death, I will be reborn in the world of formlessness,⁶⁴ so I cannot be present during the fifty years when he preaches the Law, nor can I be reborn in this world during the Former, Middle or Latter Day of the Law!" Such was his lament.

All those who are determined to attain the Way should take note of these examples and rejoice! Those concerned about their next life would do better to be common people in this, the Latter Day of the Law, than be mighty rulers during the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law. Why won't people believe this? Rather than be the chief priest of the Tendai sect, it is better to be a leper who chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo! As Emperor Wu⁶⁵ of the Liang dynasty said in his vow,⁶⁶ "I would

⁶² Hokke Shuku.

⁶³ Kalpa of Continuance: One of the four kalpas set forth in ancient Indian cosmology--the Kalpa of Formation, the Kalpa of Continuance, the Kalpa of Decline and the Kalpa of Disintegration. During this kalpa, a cyclic increase and decrease in the human life span repeats itself nineteen times. "The ninth kalpa of decrease" means the ninth period of decrease.

⁶⁴ World of formlessness: One division of the threefold world. A purely spiritual realm, the world of formlessness is free from the restrictions of matter.

⁶⁵ Wu (464-549): The first ruler of the Liang dynasty in China. Known as a man of magnanimous disposition, he deeply revered Buddhism, read the Buddhist scriptures and lectured on them.

⁶⁶ His vow: A reference to a document in which Emperor Wu pledged not to follow the way of Taoism. It actually says that he would rather sink into the evil paths for a long period of time for going against the True Law of Buddhism (yet nevertheless forming a bond with it) than be reborn in Heaven by embracing the teachings of Lao Tzu (and form no connection with Buddhism). In the Guketsu, Miao-lo expressed Emperor Wu's intention in different words, saying that he would rather be

rather be Devadatta and sink into the hell of incessant suffering than be the non-Buddhist sage Udraka Ramaputra!"⁶⁷



Happy Oeshiki !



The Middle Way

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Devadatta and sink into hell for a long period than be the non-Buddhist sage Udraka Ramaputra and be reborn in Heaven. The Daishonin's version of Emperor Wu's vow essentially follows that of Miao-lo, though the wording differs slightly.

⁶⁷ Udraka Ramaputra: A hermit and master of yogic meditation, the second teacher under whom Shakyamuni practiced after he renounced the world. According to the Daichido Ron, through the practice of meditation Udraka Ramaputra attained rebirth in Heaven, specifically in the realm where there is neither thought nor no thought, or the highest of the four realms in the world of formlessness.

How to Make Simple Cherry Blossoms

Reprinted from "DIY Cherry Blossoms" by Kara
At creationsbykara.com

SUPPLIES:

- Tissue paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Branches or dowels

INSTRUCTIONS:

1-Stack several pieces of tissue on top of each other and cut out a flower shape. It does not need to be perfect! Mine were about 2 1/2" across and had five petals, but it doesn't really matter that much. I wanted to do two colors, but you can just do one. And because I know a few of you are bound to notice. . . yes, my light pink paper has words on it. But it's all I had and I knew once it was all scrunched up they wouldn't show. Which they don't. Thank goodness.



2-For two-toned cherry blossoms, stack two flowers on top of each other with the petals not matched up.



3-Now just scrunch the flower petals up and twist the whole thing together at the bottom.



I thought it would be more realistic if there were variations in the blossoms, so I made some light pink, some dark pink, and some with the two colors together. To make smaller blossoms like the two on the left, just scrunch up one flower at a time.



4-Now it's time to glue them to your branches. I used branches that I pruned from our apple tree. If you don't have your own tree, check with your neighbors. You should be able to find some unwanted branches this time of year.

I think it looks best to apply the blossoms to the natural buds of the branch. Just add a tiny dab of hot glue, and press your blossom on.



Continue adding blossoms to all sides of your branches.



5-When you are all finished, just stick them in the container of your choice. I added some wheat at the bottom to hold them in place.

