

THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SUMMER

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IN THIS ISSUE

<i>Drinking Saké</i>	1
<i>The Current Conflict within Nichiren Shoshu</i>	2
<i>Persecution & Evil in Our Lives</i>	4
<i>The Objective of Prayer</i>	7
<i>On Prayer</i>	9

The Middle Way

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DRINKING SAKÉ

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June 2009

QUESTION: Nichiren Daishonin¹ said to Shijo Kingo², "when you drink sake, stay at home with your wife." What is the role of intoxicants in our practice of True Buddhism?

RH: The fifth precept in Buddhist teachings is "do not drink intoxicants". This is not saying that all wine is bad. If wine or saké were prohibited by this practice, there is no way that you could offer saké to Gohonzon. Daishonin drank saké given to him as an offering by believers to keep himself warm during the cold winters at Minobu. He was very grateful to have it.

There is a Japanese proverb that states *you can drink saké but do not let saké drink you. Wine could shorten your life as planing shortens wood.* Wine can lead you to lose yourself, which can be an inconvenience to others. It causes accidents, insecurity in yourself, and trouble for others. If you make trouble in society, even though you practice the correct teachings of true Buddhism, you are causing others to believe that you are doing the wrong practice. Not only that, you yourself will be unable to do the correct faith, practice, study and shakubuku³. Do not

¹ 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.

² Shijo Kingo – (1230-1300) Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Zaemon-no-jo Yorimoto – a samurai and devout follower of Nichiren Daishonin.

³ Shakabuku – a method of propagating Buddhism by directly leading a person to the True Law and refuting erroneous views.

blame saké for your trouble. It's you. You have to blame yourself for losing yourself. Even though it is not written in the sutra, this applies to drugs and gambling too. If you blame sake (alcohol), then you will also transfer the blame of your bad behavior on drugs and gambling. This will lead you to forget about practicing. You have to admonish yourself. Just as you cannot drink and drive, you cannot drink and practice. Don't drink saké and do gongyo⁴ and talk about religion. After you do gongyo and discuss Buddhism, you can drink saké and relax.

Shijo Kingo was very trusted by his lord but because he shakubukued his lord, he was punished and kept under house arrest. His colleagues were very envious of him because he was trusted by Daishonin. They wished that Shijo Kingo would lose Daishonin's trust, so they plotted to kill him. Shijo Kingo was very short tempered and loved saké. Daishonin cautioned him to control his temper and not to drink saké in a saké house in town where there were ladies. Don't give your enemies a chance to attack you, Daishonin warned. If you want to drink saké, drink saké at home with your wife's cooking. That's how Daishonin instructed Shijo Kingo.

Put practice first. Don't waste your life. Daishonin gave guidance for everyday living.

THE CURRENT CONFLICT WITHIN NICHIREN SHOSHU

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June 2009

QUESTION: Do you or does anybody in Shoshinkai⁵ have a plan as to how to deal with the current situation in True Buddhism regarding the three groups, Shoshinkai, SGI⁶, and Taisekiji⁷, all purporting to be practicing True Buddhism, yet sniping at and criticizing each other?

Reverend Hirota (RH): If a person who is practicing becomes sick or has an accident, his child is derelict or delinquent, he and his wife have divorced, and he has lost his job...if all these bad things happen, someone may say this is punishment. The one who criticizes this person may feel exalted. To do this is slander and vilification. We should stop this. We Shoshinkai priests point out the wrong doings of the Soka Gakkai and Taisekiji with regard to Daishonin's teachings. To criticize someone's personality or their way of life, their sickness, relations between husband and wife, relations between parents and children is wrong.

The Shoshinkai sends its newsletter, *Keimyo Shimbun*, to Taisekiji regularly. The Shoshinkai has also issued a standing invitation to Taisekiji for an open public discussion on the difference

⁴ Gongyo – the practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which includes the morning and evening recitation of the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

⁵ Shoshinkai – the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.

⁶ SGI – Soka Gakkai International – a lay organization that wrongly uses some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism within its own philosophy and practice.

⁷ Taisekiji – the Head Temple of Nichiren Shoshu. The organization of priests and believers associated with the Head Temple.

between Taiseikiji's understanding of the teachings and the Shoshinkai understanding. So far there has been no reply from Taiseikiji. The High Priest professes to be the modern day Daishonin. Unless he corrects his attitude, it would be futile to attempt a meaningful discussion.

With regard to the Gakkai, there are no grounds for discussion; the difference is too great. But when I meet with Gakkai members, I am very willing to talk with them and try to persuade them to take faith in Daishonin's true teachings.

Do you have any ideas about how to solve the conflict between these three related religions?

Believer 1 (B1): The only thing we can do is to explain what the correct teachings are. That's all. I don't think we should quarrel with them. All we can do is state what the correct teachings are.

RH: As you know, every year I bring incense and other gifts to you. I use the same incense for my practice in my temple, Sanbo-in, in Japan. The reasons I chose this particular incense is: 1) I like the smell—it's very fragrant; and 2) because of its name. The product name is *Towa* which means eternity. It is my hope that what we discuss here in these meetings will be conveyed to others through the Udumbara Foundation website to future generations who do not know about this Buddhism and have not been taught it, even after we all die.

I don't think there is a miracle solution that can solve this conflict all at once. As a believer, what we can do is continue to practice, and through each person's effort we can each realize what the true teaching is, and what is the wrong teaching, and make others aware of it too.

I don't have any hatred, or hold any grudges against the priests or believers of Taiseikiji temple. I left Taiseikiji 30 years ago. It is now the next generation of priests who are in power. What I find through reading articles in the temple newspaper, and hearing from the priests, is that this next generation of priests speak of the last generation of priests, especially the Shoshinkai and believers who left Taiseikiji, as despicable, stupid, and against the Law. Compared to the last generation, the newer generation is more radical, belligerent and hostile. With regard to the relationship between Soka Gakkai and Taiseikiji, I find that what the Soka Gakkai people do is that they first make up a story—a dirty rumor about Taiseikiji temple. They stalk priests of Taiseikiji and report where they go, what they do, who they see. For example, the Gakkai reported that so and so priest went to an extravagant department store and spent such and such amount of money. As for the Shoshinkai, they do not attack other religions in that way. The conflict between the Soka Gakkai and Taiseikiji temple is much more severe than the conflict between the Shoshinkai and Taiseikiji. It's a quagmire. There's no way to get out. Of course, we priests must make an effort to resolve the situation. But it is also up to you. Each believer should take on the responsibility too.

Believer 2 (B2): Is there anything in the history of Nichiren Shoshu that can help us understand or confront this problem? Is there any other time when the priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu have split up?

RH: I have mentioned Yoboji temple in Kyoto, previously. For economic reasons the priests of Taiseikiji temple invited a priest from Yoboji temple to be high priest of Taiseikiji. Taiseikiji's expectation was to get financial support from Yoboji in return. By that time, Yoboji, which had been affiliated with Taiseikiji, had already changed a lot. The new high priest from Yoboji tried to impose its style and methods of practice on Taiseikiji, such as displaying a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha on the altar. That caused a big conflict between the High Priest and Taiseikiji priests and lay believers. The conflict lasted over 100 years. I think we can learn a lesson from that conflict. It took years, but no matter how the high priests from Kyoto tried to suppress them with his authority, the Taiseikiji priests

and lay believers resisted. They challenged the authority and kept trying to correct the erroneous ways of the high priests.

Even today, 300-400 years after the conflict, the believers of Yoboji temple in Kyoto say Taisekiji temple is so ungrateful for the support and the tremendous amount of help Yoboji provided. It is difficult to overcome this kind of conflict. Even though there is conflict and a resulting split, it cannot be denied that Yoboji and Nichiren Shoshu share the same origin and root of the teaching. An example of this in the crest: the crest of Taisekiji temple and the crest of Yoboji temple are the same. They both use the same crane emblem⁸ as their crest. It's ironic that Yoboji announced that they are no longer Nichiren Shoshu, and yet they still keep the same crest. Therefore, it is apparent that we share the same root. Kitayama Homonji temple also has the same crest. So again it will take time. We must work on it patiently.

B3: I have a question about another historical conflict. It's regarding a conflict between Nichido and Nichigo at Taisekiji, which ended up with Nichigo forming the temple Hotomyohonji. But then in the 1950s Hotomyohonji rejoined Taisekiji. Then about ten years ago, Hotomyohonji split from Taisekiji. Does the Shoshinkai have any relationship with Hotomyohonji?

RH: Hotomyohonji is now an independent temple in Chiba Prefecture. It has historical archives in which are kept a lot of undeveloped and uninterpreted documents. There is a group within the Shoshinkai that is working together with Hotomyohonji to study and interpret these documents. On some points there is still a certain level of trust between the two groups.

Working together on the archives is one thing the Shoshinkai and Hotomyohonji can do successfully. But they do not share the same depth of understanding of the teachings. It is not the entire Shoshinkai that is engaged in the relationship with Hotomyohonji. It is only a few individual priests who, on their own, are collaborating to study and interpret the archives.

Your power and support is crucial. Practicing as an individual lay believer you may think that your power is insignificant and cannot help solve this problem. I believe that if each individual practices correctly and does his part to work on it, it can make a difference. Then perhaps we can advance.

PERSECUTION AND EVIL IN OUR LIVES

Reverend Raido Hirota

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June 2009

QUESTION: Please discuss what our attitude should be toward persecution in our lives.

RH: Daishonin teaches that we should live with the heart of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. There are three points Nichiren Daishonin made regarding persecution:

⁸ Crane emblem – the symbol of Nichiren Daishonin which signifies longevity, or the eternity of the Daishonin's Law

- 1) As the Daishonin understood it, when we experience persecution, it is the result of what we have done in a former life. Perhaps in a former life we persecuted someone who practiced . We should not resist or fight it.
- 2) The *shoten zenjin*⁹ are protective and supportive of the practitioner. So if we are persecuted, there is a reason why the *shoten zenjin* let the persecution take place. Presumably the *shoten zenjin* have an expectation of us—either new awareness, or something else.
- 3) It is clearly written in the Lotus Sutra¹⁰ that anyone who practices Namu-myoho-rence-kyo correctly, will encounter life threatening challenges.

QUESTION: In the Goshō, “Explaining the Causation of the Ten Worlds” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Vol. II, p. 201, column 2), Daishonin says, “*Ninth is the world of bodhisattvas, those who remain among the ordinary mortals of the six paths of existence, thinking little of their own lives but much of the lives of others, aiming always to take evil upon themselves and to dole out good to other beings.*” Please explain what “*aiming always to take evil upon themselves*” means. There is a lot of evil in the world, even in our own environments. What is the behavior of someone who aims to take evil upon him or herself?

RH: There is an intrinsic life within you. Within this intrinsic life is the six lower worlds of Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, and Heaven. Existing within these six lower worlds there are foolishness, weakness, cunning, doubt, envy, vanity, lying, censure, cruelty, self-centeredness... You have to acknowledge this and accept it. I am not a great person; I have many faults. I am practicing the most precious Lotus Sutra. But I am not elite because I practice the Lotus Sutra. It is only the Lotus Sutra that teaches that even persons such as me have the Buddha’s life within them. I am going to continue to practice the Law and tell others. This is the Way of a real Bodhisattva.

B4: What does it mean, “to always take evil upon yourself”? It sounds like you want to go out and take on all the evil in the world.

B1: It seems that the last two sentences of Rev. Hirota’s statement are saying, despite this evil, I am going to continue to practice this Law and tell others. Despite whatever is in me and outside of me—in the face of what I have to confront both within myself and from outside, I’m going to tell people what the Law is.

RH: Acknowledge and accept that you also have this evil aspect in your life, and admit that you are not so honorable. And because we have so many weak points—so many evil aspects within us—we are practicing this great teaching. This is related to the last answer. When Nichiren Daishonin was persecuted he said, “it is because in my former life I must have persecuted someone who was practicing Namu-myoho-rence-kyo.” So even if you do not admit that you have the evil inside you, you still may have done something in your former life to result in the persecution in your present existence. Also, because you practice the Lotus Sutra, it doesn’t mean that you are special or elite. But the Lotus Sutra is the only teaching that professes that even someone as lowly as me still has the life of Buddha. Practicing this Law and trying to convey this Law to others is the way of Buddha.

⁹ Shoten Zenjin – Buddhist gods – they are occurrences that are not humanly possible, can’t be seen and are not scientifically explained. They are inexplicable phenomena that occur.

¹⁰ 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.

B1: So what does that phrase mean, “aiming always to take evil upon themselves”?

RH: This phrase exactly describes the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyo¹¹. It’s the same meaning. *I respect everyone deeply, I do not despise anyone or look down on anyone with contempt, because everyone can become a Buddha of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo, if they believe in Namu-myoho-rence-kyo and practice.*

Jofukyo was a bodhisattva which is the 9th world, just below the 10th world of Buddhahood. However, he chose to live amongst the six lower worlds and announce to people of these lower worlds that he respected and admired them for their innate Buddha nature. The people in the lower realms angrily said to him, “what are you talking about?” They expressed their hatred of him, and ridiculed and stoned him, and swore at him. Bodhisattva Jofukyo never fought back. He kept saying to them, “I respect you deeply...” because, as he said, in his former life he must have persecuted others who were practicing Namu-myoho-rence-kyo.

The world of bodhisattva is just one step before Buddhahood. Why would a bodhisattva have to suffer? As you can see, he explained the reason. It is because in a former life he persecuted others who practiced. If bodhisattvas suffer, it is therefore natural that we would suffer, too.

B4: This is what Christ did. So what’s the difference?

B5: Christ existed in heaven, not in the mundane world. He descended to earth, became human in order to sacrifice himself to take on the sins of mankind to redeem mankind.

RH: The concept of sin or evil is totally different between Buddhism and Christianity. In Christianity, the original sin is the sin of all of humankind. In Buddhism, sin is individual. It is each person’s sin. Christ descended to earth from heaven. In Christianity, we cannot become Christ—we cannot be equal to him. Buddhism, by contrast, teaches that we can be a bodhisattva and we can be a Buddha. We can reach those worlds. But, we will still suffer. Even after you become a bodhisattva, you will suffer.

What I question is that it is said in Christianity that Christ took on all the sins of human beings. He was crucified, and through crucifixion he took mankind’s sins on himself. If that is so, then why are Christians suffering? And why are all people still suffering?

B5: The crucial difference is that sin is absolved only through the power of Christ’s will, not through the intrinsic Buddha nature of the human being. Without Christ there is no possibility of eradicating the sin. If you don’t accept Christ’s will, you will continue to suffer. As opposed to Buddhism which teaches that once you reveal your own inherent Buddha nature, you will face evil and suffering, but it will be a source of joy and progress and enlightenment.

RH: In Christianity, salvation comes from God and from Christ. In Buddhism, you experience the Ten Worlds throughout your practice, and you realize salvation on your own. If you reach bodhisattva or Buddhahood, you will then help others realize their own salvation.

¹¹ Bodhisattva Jofukyo – Bodhisattva Fukyo – a bodhisattva described in the 20th chapter of the Lotus Sutra who revered everyone for their innate Buddha nature.

The Nembutsu¹², or the Pure Land Teaching, which is the Buddhism that worships Amida Buddha¹³, teaches that Amida Buddha will appear and save everyone. So individuals pray to Amida Buddha, calling his name—Namu Amitahba—asking him to save them. But what we practice here is the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which requires each person to make the effort to realize their own individual salvation. This concept of individual salvation is an advanced concept, whereas Amida Buddhism and Christianity are lower level teachings.

THE OBJECTIVE OF PRAYER

Reverend Raido Hirota
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June 2009

QUESTION: Western religions all use some form of prayer. People pray to God for many things: forgiveness, mercy, health, prosperity, protection, etc. In meditative practices, or “New Age” Western practices, people concentrate on drawing things they want into their lives. They think positive thoughts. They try to attract good things into their lives. In the beginning of our Buddhist practices, we “chanted for benefits”. Sometimes, we use the principle of “bonno-soku-bodai” (煩惱即菩提. Earthly desires equal enlightenment) to justify chanting to fulfill our desires. Later, we were taught that chanting “for” things is incorrect. So I would like to ask you...what should be in our minds when we chant? Should we try to think of nothing? To simply say the words and hear the daimoku¹⁴? Or, should we think about bringing forth our Buddha nature? What should be our intent, what should be in our minds when we chant?

RH: You should pray only for the enlightenment of all living things. This is what I do. You do not need to try to not think. Thoughts always appear. When these thoughts arise then think about the enlightenment of all living things. If thoughts come again, go back to thinking about the enlightenment of all living things. The enlightenment of all living things is the goal of all Buddhas. There is no other wish.

Technology is so advanced these days that they can program a robot to teach Buddhism. But what would be missing is the heart. Without engaging your heart, you cannot convey the teachings or affect anyone else. And you certainly cannot change yourself.

B3: Is that related to *shinnyo daimoku*?

RH: At the end of gongyo you read the silent prayers. The reason you read the prayers silently is to place the focus on your heart, and to see the Buddha’s life in you.

¹² Nembutsu – Jodo sect, Jodo Shin sect, Ji sect, and Yuzu Nembutsu sect all worship Amida Buddha and seek to attain rebirth in the Pure Land.

¹³ Amida Buddha – infinite life or infinite light Buddha who is said to reside in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the Western region. Followers seek to him for salvation.

¹⁴ Daimoku – Odaimoku – chanting Namu-myoho-enge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

When I was an acolyte studying to become a priest, I didn't know the reason for the silent prayers, so I spent that time sleeping.

B5: You say, "just think about the enlightenment of all living beings." What do you mean?

RH: As for myself, when I pray for everyone's enlightenment, I pray wanting to know how to convey the Buddha's Law to other people. Or if I should meet an opponent, I pray that I don't get angry, but instead try to think that although he may have wronged me in some way, I'm not going to despise him because he too has the Buddha's heart. I also pray to find a better way to teach believers about the Law.

It's easy to read through the prayers and gloss over the abstract ideas that are written, but at the same time, I pray that I can continue to carry over my desire to convey the Buddha's Law to others into my daily life, my daily heart.

As you know, the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyo are the same. The idea behind it is the aspiration for everyone's enlightenment.

I have explained how I pray, or what I pray for during gongyo, but the answer can be different for each of you, each case is different. You have to keep trying to find your own way. The way to put the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyo into action will be different for each of you.

QUESTION: Can we be in a state of enlightenment other than when we are chanting *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*¹⁵? If the answer were, "No," that would imply that no individual who does not chant *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* can ever be in a state of enlightenment. If the answer is "Yes," what other causes could result in someone being in an enlightened state?

RH: Chanting *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* is a threefold practice of *shin-ku-i*. *Shin* means to use your body; *ku* is to use your mouth; and *i* is to use your mind. Thus you use your body, mouth and mind in concert when chanting *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*.

Are you using your body in the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism? Or to put it another way, does *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* appear in your behavior? Is your mouth expressing *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* truly? Can you ascribe your thoughts to *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*, or do they truly reflect *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*?

Let's say someone has a throat disease and may not be able to voice *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*. If this person has a strong understanding and truly applies *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* in his or her life, then this person is expressing *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* even though he or she cannot vocalize it. On the other hand, someone may be in great physical condition and can chant *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* clearly without any problems, but while this person is sitting in front of Gohonzon¹⁶ chanting *daimoku* his or her mind is somewhere else, perhaps scolding the children, or cleaning the altar, or doing any number of things. Then, even though this person's mouth can clearly voice *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*, he or she is not expressing or demonstrating *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* in his or her life. There is also the case where someone experiences *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* while chanting in front of Gohonzon. But once he stops chanting and leaves Gohonzon, if one leaves the spirit of chanting behind, then that person is not doing the threefold practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism either. It is very important to conduct your practice of *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* with body, mouth and mind. Then even though

¹⁵ *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* – the Mystic Law; the ultimate Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

¹⁶ Gohonzon – the scroll that is the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, representing the universal Law of *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* and the Buddha nature in all things.

you may be ill, or have a vocal impediment, or have other conditions that prevent you from sitting in front of Gohonzon and or vocalizing Namu-myoho-renge-kyo naturally, you can nevertheless definitely achieve the life condition of the Buddha.

GOSHO SELECTION

EXCERPTS

“ON PRAYER

Nichiren the Shramana of Japan”¹⁷

Question: Of the types of prayer that one offers based upon the teachings of the Kegon sect¹⁸, the Hosso sect¹⁹, the Sanron sect²⁰, the three Hinayana sects²¹, the Shingon sect²² or the Tendai sect²³, which type is effective?

Answer: Since they represent the preaching of the Buddha, they can all in some sense be considered prayer. But prayers that are based upon the Lotus Sutra are certain to be true prayers.

Question: What is the reason for that?

Answer: The persons of the two vehicles²⁴, though they spent kalpas numerous as the dust particles of the earth practicing the sutras that correspond to the first four flavors, could never attain Buddhahood. But by listening to the Lotus Sutra for just an instant they became Buddhas. For this reason, Shariputra²⁵, Mahakashyapa²⁶ and the others who make up the twelve hundred persons and the twelve thousand persons, and all the other persons of the two vehicles who attained Buddhahood, will certainly respond to the prayers of those who practice the Lotus Sutra. And they will take upon themselves the pains of such practitioners.

....

During the first forty and more years of the Buddha's teaching life, the various bodhisattvas had tried to attain Buddhahood through the sutras beginning with the Kegon Sutra, but they were unable to

¹⁷ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 7, pp. 29-55

¹⁸ Kegon Sect – based on the “Flower Garland Sutra” (Kegon sutra), it sets forth the many stages of bodhisattva practice and teaches that all things are interrelated and give rise to one another.

¹⁹ Hosso Sect – analyzes and classifies all phenomena so as to clarify the ultimate reality.

²⁰ Sanron Sect – believes that because all phenomena appear and disappear solely by virtue of their relationship with other phenomena, they have no independent reality or self-nature and are without substance.

²¹ Hinayana sects – or Theravada Buddhism teaches the ultimate aim of attaining nirvana of no remainder, the state in which both body and mind are annihilated, and one is no longer born in the world.

²² Shingon Sect –based on the Dainichi and Kongocho sutras, practitioners chant the secret words uttered by Mahavairochana (Dainichi) Buddha.

²³ Tendai Sect – the Japanese religion based on the Chinese T’ien-t’ai school practice the meditation to observe one’s mind as established by T’ien-t’ai.

²⁴ Two vehicles – Hinayana Buddhism. Two teachings expounded for people of Learning and Realization. The four noble truths was taught to lead people of Learning to the state of arhat, or one who has nothing more to learn; the 12-linked chain of causation was taught to lead people of Realization to pratyekabuddha, which is awakening to the impermanence of all things.

²⁵ Shariputra – (Jp. Sharihotsu) – one of Shakyamuni Buddha’s major disciples, known as the foremost in wisdom.

²⁶ Mahakashyapa – one of Shakyamuni Buddha’s major disciples, known as the foremost in ascetic practices.

do so. But when the Hoben chapter²⁷ of the Lotus Sutra was preached, announcing the concise replacement of the three vehicles²⁸ with the one vehicle²⁹, then: "The bodhisattvas seeking to be Buddhas in a great force of eighty thousand, as well as the wheel-turning kings³⁰ [who] come from ten thousands of millions of lands, all press their palms and with reverent minds wish to hear the teaching of perfect endowment."

And when, in response to this desire, they heard the expanded replacement of the three vehicles with the one vehicle, then, we are told, "When the bodhisattvas hear this Law, they will be released from all entanglements of doubt."

....

Similarly, at the gathering on Eagle Peak, the dragon king's daughter attained Buddhahood in her present form. In the Hinayana sutras women were despised because they are hindered by the thick clouds of the five obstacles³¹ and bound by the strong chords of the three obediences³²; and in the Mahayana³³ sutras expounded in the first forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching, women were rejected, since they were thought to be incapable of carrying out religious practice over many kalpas. Or, though it had been stated that "The first time they conceive the desire to do so, they can attain enlightenment," this was indicated as a possibility in name only, with no actual examples to support it. So, in effect, the attainment of Buddhahood by women was denied.

Thus, even a woman who was in the realm of human or heavenly beings had no hope of ever finding the way to become a Buddha. How much less hope was there for this woman [described in the Lotus Sutra], a humble being born among the creatures known as dragons, who had not yet reached maturity but was only eight years old. And yet, contrary to all expectations, through the instruction of Monju³⁴, in the short space of time between the Hosshi and Devadatta chapters³⁵ when the Buddha was preaching the Hoto chapter³⁶, in the midst of the ocean she attained Buddhahood. This was a most wonderful happening! If it had not been for the power of the Lotus Sutra, the foremost among all the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime, how could such a thing have come about?

Therefore, Miao-lo remarks of the event: "Practice is shallow but the results are profound, which is evidence of the power of the sutra." And because the dragon girl was able to attain Buddhahood through this sutra, even if she had not been admonished against it by the Buddha, how could she ever abandon someone who is a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra? Therefore, in the verse that she uttered in praise of the Buddha, she stated: "I unfold the doctrines of the great vehicle to rescue living beings from suffering."

²⁷ Hoben chapter – Expedient Means, the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which Shakyamuni declares that all Buddha's come into the world solely for the purpose of enabling all people to realize enlightenment, and that all living things have innate Buddha nature.

²⁸ Three vehicles – the teachings taught for people of Learning, for people of Realization and for Bodhisattvas.

²⁹ One vehicle – the teaching that leads all people, regardless of their level of understanding, to supreme enlightenment. The one vehicle in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is Namu-myoho-enge-kyo.

³⁰ Wheel-turning Kings – ideal kings who rule the world by justice and reason rather than force. They rule the four continents surrounding the mythical Mt. Sumeru.

³¹ Five obstacles – or five hindrances or limitations of women set forth in some Buddhist teachings: a woman cannot become a Bonten, a Taishaku, a devil king, a wheel-turning king or a Buddha. This concept was refuted in the 12th (Devadatta) chapter of the Lotus Sutra when the Dragon King's daughter became enlightened.

³² Three obediences – a code of conduct set forth in the Kegon sutra in which women must obey their parents in childhood, their husbands after marriage, and the sons in old age.

³³ Mahayana – the greater of the two branches of Buddhism. Its teachings expound the bodhisattva practices as the means to enlightenment for oneself and for others. Mahayana Buddhism spread to China, Korea and Japan.

³⁴ Monju – Monjushiri – a bodhisattva who is depicted in the sutras as an attendant to Shakyamuni Buddha. He represents the virtues of wisdom and enlightenment.

³⁵ Hosshi and Devadatta chapters – the 10th and 12th chapters of the Lotus Sutra respectively

³⁶ Hoto chapter – the 11th chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

Her oath was the oath taken by her retinue, or all the creatures known as dragons, whose number is so vast that "it can be neither expressed by the mouth nor fathomed by the mind." The dragon king Sagara, though only a lowly creature, cared profoundly for his daughter. Therefore he took the finest treasure in all the great ocean, a wish-granting jewel, and had his daughter present it to the Buddha as alms, in recognition of the fact that she had attained Buddhahood in her present form. This jewel was equivalent in value to a major world system.

Devadatta was the grandson of King Simhahanu, the son of Shakyamuni Buddha's uncle, King Dronodana, and an elder brother of the Venerable Ananda. His mother was a daughter of the rich man Suprabuddha. He was thus a member of the family of a wheel-turning king and held a high social position in the southern continent of Jambudvīpa³⁷.

While he was still an ordinary member of society, the woman he had intended to marry, Yashodhara, was taken away by Prince Siddhartha³⁸, and he thereafter looked upon him as he would an enemy from a past existence.

Later, he broke his ties with his family and joined the Buddhist order, but when there were large gatherings of human beings and heavenly beings, the Buddha would censure him, calling him a fool or one who eats others' spit. In addition, being a man who cared deeply about fame and personal profit, he envied the attention that was paid to the Buddha. He then began observing the five ascetic practices in an attempt to appear more admirable than the Buddha. He pounded iron to make a thousand-spoked wheel pattern to imprint on his feet, gathered together fireflies to form a tuft of white hair between his eyebrows, and committed to memory sixty thousand and eighty thousand jeweled teachings. He erected an ordination platform on Mount Gayashirsha and lured many of the Buddha's disciples over to his side. He painted his fingernails with poison and attempted to smear the poison on the feet of the Buddha. He beat the nun Utpalavarna to death, and rolled a huge rock down on the Buddha, injuring the latter on the toe. He was guilty of committing three of the cardinal sins³⁹, and in the end gathered about him all the evil men of the five regions of India and strove to harm the Buddha and his disciples and lay supporters.

King Bimbisara was the foremost of the Buddha's lay supporters. Each day he dispatched five hundred wagons, day after day supplying alms to the Buddha and his disciples. But Devadatta, driven by his intense jealousy, talked to Prince Ajatashatru, and in time persuaded him to attack his father, King Bimbisara, whereupon he killed his father by pinning him down with seven foot-long nails.

In the end, the earth in front of the northern gate of the capital city of Rajagriha split open and Devadatta fell into the great citadel of the Avichi hell⁴⁰. There was not a single being in the entire major world system who did not witness the event.

One would suppose that as a result, he would never be able to escape from the great citadel of incessant suffering, even though as many kalpas should pass as there are particles of dust on the earth. And yet, amazing as it is, and admirable as well, in the Lotus Sutra he became a Buddha called Heavenly King. And if Devadatta can become a Buddha, then all the countless other evil persons who were enticed by him, since they shared with him the same karmic cause and effect, must surely have been able to escape from the pains of the hell of incessant suffering.

³⁷ Jambudvīpa –according to the ancient Indian world view it is one of the four continents surrounding Mt. Sumeru, where people are less happy than in the other three continents, because this continent is populated by people with bad karma. It is here that Buddhism appears and spreads.

³⁸ Prince Siddhartha – Shakyamuni Buddha's given or childhood name. Siddhartha literally means, "one who has achieved the goal."

³⁹ Cardinal sins – five cardinal sins – the most serious offenses in Buddhism: 1) killing one's father, 2) killing one's mother; 3) killing an arhat, 4) injuring a Buddha, 5) causing disunity among believers.

⁴⁰ Avichi hell – Hell of incessant suffering. One who commits one of the five cardinal sins or slanders the True Law is said to fall into this hell.

This is entirely due to the benefit and blessing of the Lotus Sutra. Thus Devadatta and all the countless persons who attended him now can dwell in the house of the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra [in order to protect them]. What a comforting thought!

The various bodhisattvas, who were as numerous as the particles of dust on the earth, had advanced to the level of near-perfect enlightenment, which means they had freed themselves of everything but their fundamental darkness. When they were fortunate enough to encounter Shakyamuni Buddha, they thought that they would be able to smash this great boulder of fundamental darkness. But in the first forty and more years of his preaching life Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, explained that while he could expound on the causes of enlightenment, he could not expound on its effects. There fore he did not make clear to them the benefits of perfect enlightenment. Hence not a single one of them was able to advance to the stage of perfect enlightenment. This was contrary to their expectations.

But during the eight years when he preached at Eagle Peak, the Buddha expounded on the effects of enlightenment, which are called the one vehicle of Buddhahood. All the bodhisattvas were then able to advance to the stage of perfect enlightenment, so that their enlightenment was equal to that of Shakyamuni Buddha. It was as though they had climbed to the very top of Mount Sumeru⁴¹ and could see in all four directions. All became bright and clear, as though the sun had appeared in the midst of a long night. Even if the Buddha had not instructed them to do so, could they have failed to resolve to spread the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, or to take upon themselves the sufferings of its practitioners?

Therefore, they made a vow, saying, "We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way," "We... never begrudging our bodies or lives," or "We will preach this sutra far and wide."

....

One who is a ruler of a nation has become so because in the past he upheld the correct teaching and served the Buddha. It is through the calculations of the heavenly kings Bonten⁴² and Taishaku⁴³, the deities of the sun and moon, the Four Heavenly Kings and others that all rulers, great and small, succeed in acquiring their districts and domains. Thus the sutra says: "Now when I use the five types of vision to clearly perceive the three existences⁴⁴, I see that all the kings in their past existences served five hundred Buddhas, and that is the reason they were able to become emperors and sovereigns."

But if one turns his back on the Lotus Sutra and follows the heretical teachers of Shingon, Zen and Nembutsu, then although he may carry out all kinds of good deeds, these will never accord with the will of the Buddha and will go against the intention of the gods. One should give very careful thought to this matter.

It is a rare thing to be born as a human being. And if, having been born as such, you do not do your best to distinguish between the correct doctrine and the heretical so that in the future you may attain Buddhahood, then you are certainly not fulfilling your true worth as a human being.

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⁴¹ Mt. Sumeru – according to the world.

⁴² Bonten – in Buddhism, one

⁴³ Taishaku – in Buddhism th

⁴⁴ Three existences – past, pr and effect.

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