

# ON ATTAINING ENLIGHTENMENT

With Reverend Raido Hirota

Translated and edited by Udumbara Foundation volunteers

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**QUESTION:** How many years do I have to chant *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* to attain Buddhahood?

**Rev. Hirota (RH):** To ask this question is like asking how much food in total do I have to eat during my lifetime in order to live? The amount of food one person eats from birth to about age 80, can't be eaten all at once. It is gradually consumed. In order to live, you have to eat three times a day. The same is true of chanting: you have to do it twice a day, every day. It's a continuing process that doesn't end. You do it day after day until you die. It's not the goal that is important. What is important is how you live your life each day, not what is at the end of the road you take. You have to look at this as what you do day after day and not as what it will bring to you tomorrow or the next day.

The two *kanji* characters which make up the word "*renge*" exist in the phrase *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*. *Re* means lotus flower. *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* is like the flower itself. The exquisite flower has a distinctive seedpod at its center. Its seeds and blossom exist at the same time before the blossom withers and dies. The lotus flower blossom is itself the result and its seeds, that are visible at its center, are the cause. This is also true of life. That is why the Buddha used the extraordinarily beautiful lotus flower -- *renge* -- as the symbol for the Law of *Namu-myoho-renge-*

*kyo*, because both the blossom, which is the effect, and the seeds, which are the cause, exist at the same time. They coexist simultaneously.

It is generally accepted that cause and effect are two separate entities. For instance, if you exert yourself you become hungry. These two exist separately. Work is the cause, hunger, which occurs later, is the effect. But *renge* is different. *Renge* symbolizes simultaneous cause and effect. That is, with *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* cause and effect exist at the same time. There isn't cause -- then an effect. There aren't two. There is no end of one and a beginning of the other. There is no separation between the cause and the effect. They are the same. They coexist. The moment you chant *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* enlightenment is there. There is no distinction between a cause made and its effect. *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* is both the cause and the effect.

This is something difficult for human beings to understand so we dissect it, but it is not actually meant to be dissected. Everything coexists at the same time. Your mother and father, for example, produced you. You are the product of your parents. Looking at it from the child's point of view the child would say that it's because of them that I exist. To the child the mother and father were the cause. To the parents the child is the result. He is the result of his parents. If he has a child he would be the cause, his child would be the result. And so on, and so forth, it's a continuing process. You can't look at it one way or the other. How can you separate the cause from the effect?

In the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, Shakyamuni taught that cause and effect were separate, occurring at different times. Before the Lotus Sutra was taught you had to practice for many lifetimes to attain Buddhahood. You made a series of causes for which you would receive the effect. Then with the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni completely changed his teachings and taught that cause and effect exist simultaneously. It's not how long you practice Buddhism, or that you chant to attain Buddhahood, it's that you have Buddhahood within your life, and reveal it while you're chanting *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*. When you make the cause you have the effect. With the practice of the Lotus Sutra you are making and receiving the cause and effect at the same time.

Chanting is the same as revealing *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* because the cause and the effect are the same; they exist at the same moment.

**QUESTION:** How do I chant so that one *ODaimoku* in a single moment of time will bring me to enlightenment?

**RH:** You must pray as if you are calling everyone to your enlightenment. You have to have that kind of feeling when you chant. You chant *Daimoku* in such a way as if you are calling everyone

in the whole universe, not just this one or that one, but everyone -- all life -- to this enlightenment. The way to pray is as it is written in the last prayer of Gongyo:

*May the impartial benefits of Myoho-renge-kyo spread equally, to the farthest reaches of the universe so that I, together with all other existence, may attain the tranquil state of enlightened life.*

This does not only include believers of this Buddhism. It includes all people and all things, for they too have *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* and Buddhahood. Everyone -- believers, and non-believers -- have these equally, whether they believe it or not. By chanting this intensely you are calling forth all life to awaken the Buddha-nature.

Most other religions are concerned with human beings alone. True Buddhism is concerned with all life in whatever form it may be. Insects, bacteria, animals, birds. There's no one particular thing, it's all encompassing, even aliens or whatever there might be in outerspace. The teachings before the Lotus Sutra only spoke of human beings as the targets for enlightenment, but with the Lotus Sutra all life -- the whole universe -- became the objects of enlightenment. Everything in life -- your pants, your shirt, your tie, your glasses, dew drops, the minutest particles of life -- all life!