

# ON CHANTING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

With Reverend Raido Hirota

Translated and edited by Udumbara Foundation volunteers

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**Question:** Why does the chant have to be in a foreign language? Why do the terms have to be in a foreign language?

**Rev. Hirota:** The sutra we chant is written in Chinese. Kumarajiva (344-413 C.E.), an Indian Buddhist scholar who, from a young age traveled all over with his mother traveled studying Buddhism and learning different languages. His scholarship became renown and he was invited to China where he translated the Lotus Sutra into Chinese. It is his translation that we recite. Nevertheless, the way we pronounce the sutra is Japanese, not Chinese.



In China, *kanji* characters are used as the alphabet. Each kanji character has many meanings. For example *kokoro* means mind, spirit, heart, feeling.

南無

*Namu*

*Namu* from *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* means I devote my life to belief. If you were to translate *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* into English it would be a very long ODaimoku. But in fact, it could not be ODaimoku because it would be too long. If the writing on the Gohonzon were translated into the language of every country, it would never fit on the Gohonzon. Even among Japanese there is not one person who understands the meaning of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* or ODaimoku. Japanese know there is some writing on the Gohonzon. But to them Gohonzon and the Lotus Sutra are a foreign language too. If the sutra

was translated so that all people could understand it, it would be like a dictionary, and morning and evening Gongyo would take 20 to 30 hours to complete.

Within each *kanji* character there is a very deep meaning. Our practice of reciting the Lotus Sutra and studying this Buddhism deepens our faith. Don't think of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* and the sutra as Japanese, because it does not belong to any one country or anyone language. Just accept this as the universal language of the Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin.