

# THE TRUE RELIGION FOR OUR TIME

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## THE LATTER DAY OF THE LAW - (MAPPO)

IN THE *Yakuo* (23rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra there is a sentence which reads, "In the last five hundred years, after my extinction, proclaim and spread [this Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo] abroad in the [the world of men], lest it be lost and Mara the Evil [One], his [agents], gods, dragons, [the attendants of the Four Heavenly Kings], [demons] and others gain their opportunity." What this means is, since the guardians of heaven, bodhisattvas and others who were present during the lifetime of the Buddha are no longer responsible for the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day, do not ask them for aid. It is the living beings of the Latter Day who must guard this Law of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* in their place.

The last five hundred year period mentioned in this phrase refers to the age of Mappo, the Latter Day of the Law. As a rule, all Buddhists had been taught the Buddha's teaching that there are three time periods after the Buddha's decease:

1. The Former Day of the Law (the righteous law) = 1000 years.
2. The Middle Day of the Law (the imitative law) = 1000 years.
3. The Latter Day of the Law (the last law) = All the years thereafter.

There have been various theories advanced as to the year of Shakyamuni Buddha's death. Nichiren Daishonin trusted and followed the division of the period which T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo the Great

espoused (T'ien-t'ai founded the T'ien-t'ai sect in China based on the Lotus Sutra; Dengyo the Great transmitted the Lotus Sutra to Japan.) According to these sources Shakyamuni Buddha's date of birth is April 8, 1029 B.C., and his death, February 15, 949 B.C. The period of the Former Day of the Law ranges from 949 B.C. to 51 A.D.; the Middle Day of the Law ranges from 51 A.D. to 1052 A.D.; and the Latter Day of the Law begins in 1052 A.D. Thus the Daishonin's year of birth, 1222 A.D., falls upon the 170th year after the beginning of the Latter Day.

### **ELEMENTS OF THE THREE TIME PERIODS**

There are three important elements in the Buddhist scriptures: teaching, practice and proof.

1. Teaching = doctrine; texts
2. Practice = practicing in accordance with the doctrine; faith; way of life
3. Proof = the consequence of putting doctrine into practice; enlightenment

Teaching, practice and proof are the fundamental elements of Buddhism. The three elements as viewed through the three time periods looks as follows:

1. During the Former Day of the Law - the period of the righteous law, which was the first 1,000 year period after Shakyamuni Buddha passed away - all three elements of teaching, practice and proof of his Buddhism existed.
2. During the Middle Day of the Law - the period of the imitative law, from 1,001 to 1,999 years after the Buddha's death, teaching and practice existed, but no longer any proof or enlightenment. That is why it is called an imitation of the law.
3. During the Latter Day of the Law, the period of the last law which began 2,000 years after the Buddha's death, the teaching alone remains as a symbol, but neither practice nor proof or enlightenment exist.

This demonstrates that as time went by we humans departed from the truth, our minds deteriorated and we came to believe something other than what is true.

The Buddha awakened to the true Law as a result of his practice. At the point of his awakening he was just a human being. As time elapsed, he came to be regarded as something greater and greater. From his original status as an ordinary human being, his stature has evolved to what it is today, a charismatic figure - a being above the clouds, beyond our reach. The same is true of God and Christ, and also of Dainichi Buddha and Amida Buddha preached about in Buddhism.

However, the true Law is the teaching of "Enlightenment for all living things." This is the purpose and reason for the Buddha's appearance in the world. This is what he tried to transmit in the scriptures; it is the reason we do Gongyo and chant Daimoku. All of this is for the sake of "Enlightenment for all living things." Contrary to what some believe, it is not the purpose of the true Law to realize happiness by fulfilling our hopes and desires.

"All living things" referred to here means all life and phenomena in this world. This includes not only human beings, but also light, air, water, soil, animals, insects, plants, etc. As human beings cannot live on their own, you cannot achieve salvation by preaching a salvation for human beings alone. Without the salvation of all life and phenomena there cannot be salvation for human beings. A humankind centered religion cannot provide a true teaching, nor can it provide salvation. Christianity and many other religions consider human beings to be the center of everything. This is wrong. It is only humans who believe that human beings are the center of everything.

It was the Buddha's intent to show us that it is meaningless to worship the Buddha for one's salvation in the Latter Day. He wanted us to reject any charismatic nature we perceived in him and other bodhisattvas; and he wanted us to clearly see the true intent and essence of the Buddha's teachings. That is, the true Law that is equal and common to all living things. It is because of the true Law that Buddha exists. Return to that which is Law-centered rather than Buddha-centered. The Law is neither Buddha's possession, nor his creation. Return to the original Law as it is.

In the Lotus Sutra Shakyamuni Buddha transmitted and entrusted the true Law to Bodhisattva Jogyo as a bodhisattva for the Latter Day. His hope was that the people of this age would attain enlightenment by following and revering, as teacher and guide, the bodhisattva who conducted his life exactly as the Lotus Sutra teaches.

"Rely upon the true Law; do not rely upon persons," this is the basis of Buddhism. Here the Buddha declares his limitations and asserts that he will not be needed in the age of Mappo. Although Shakyamuni Buddha preached the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, he did not practice or conduct himself accordingly. He was not a person who practiced the Lotus Sutra. He preached the doctrine but could not prove it by means of practice and enlightenment.

Based on the calculated length of each time period, the Latter Day of the Law has arrived. People were afraid of this age, expecting something terrible to happen. Despite their fears, the world has not been annihilated, neither has the political power or world order been toppled. Consequently,

those people who believe in Buddhism came to think that nothing would change in the Latter Day, so they continue to worship Buddha. What people have not realized or have ignored is the conversion to a new system of thought in the spiritual world, which is precisely what Buddha wanted to convey to us. People have forgotten and repudiated the meaning of the Latter Day of the Law.

All the founders of the various Buddhist sects in existence during the time of Nichiren Daishonin were searching for the teaching suitable for the Latter Day - the age when Shakyamuni Buddha would be renounced. Their efforts led to the formation of many new religions including Zen, Jodo, Shingon, Jodo-Shin, and so on. Originally they all insisted that only their teaching could replace the Buddha's teachings in the Latter Day. But now they have all taken the view that it does not matter which religion to believe since nothing unusual has taken place in the age of the Latter Day. Worshipping everything has become acceptable, regardless of the differences in teaching, objective, and the form of enlightenment of each sect. It is Nichiren Daishonin's teaching alone that has completely heeded the true significance of the Latter Day of the Law.

### **NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S POSITION**

Nichiren Daishonin became a priest at Seicho-ji temple on Mount Kiyosumi. This temple followed the combined teachings of the Shingon and T'ien-t'ai sects. It was to achieve the following four objectives that the Daishonin became a priest:

1. To find the cause for the world's disorder.
2. To learn the teaching which surpasses all other religions in the world.
3. To achieve an enlightenment that corresponds to the correct teaching.
4. To transmit the correct teaching to his parents, his sovereign, other officials, and his relatives; to repay his debt of gratitude to them; and to enable them to achieve an enlightenment accordingly.

In order to realize his four objectives Nichiren Daishonin left the Kiyosumi temple and embarked on a 16-year-long journey of study and practice. He spent the majority of this time practicing and studying at Enryaku-ji temple on Mt. Hiei, the center of the T'ien-t'ai sect where the religion based on the Lotus Sutra got its start in Japan. By the time the Daishonin had arrived at Mt. Hiei the T'ien-t'ai sect had become a mixture of the Shingon, Zen, Nembutsu sects of Buddhism, and Shintoism, the national ritualistic belief and way of life. The priests would chant *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* during the morning prayers and *Namu-Amidabutsu* (devotion to Amida Buddha) during

evening prayers. There no longer existed a spirit of T'ien-t'ai from China, the essence of whose teaching is the Lotus Sutra, nor a spirit of Dengyo the Great who transmitted and propagated T'ien-t'ai's pure sect in Japan. The same is true with today's T'ien-t'ai sect. Nevertheless, they claim that the T'ien-t'ai sect is superior to all other sects, since all the sects of Buddhism in Japan originated from it. Yet they do not understand that all the founders of the various other Buddhisms left Mt. Hiei to start their own sects when after practicing the teachings of the T'ien-t'ai sect they found no salvation, and finally rejected the teaching of the T'ien-t'ai school.

After studying and practicing the teachings of many religions, Nichiren Daishonin came to the conclusion that the Lotus Sutra was the teaching that was superior to any other Buddhist scripture. It is the Law of "Enlightenment of all living things." Elucidated in the following sutra passages is the necessity for us to keep our faith pure, believing in the Lotus Sutra without mixing it with other teachings as the T'ien-t'ai sect had done:

- *In the Sutra of Innumerable Meanings* (the preface to the Lotus Sutra, or the first volume of the three-fold Lotus Sutra) we read, "In forty years and more I have not yet revealed the truth."
- In the *Hoben-pon* (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra we read, "Honestly discard the provisional teachings and only proclaim the supreme Way [this Lotus Sutra]."
- And the *Hiyu-bon* (3rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra reads, "Do not accept or believe any sutra other than the Lotus Sutra."

Thus by commingling its teachings with other teachings the T'ien-t'ai sect has, as well as many other religions, deteriorated and become adverse to the supreme doctrine.

The Lotus Sutra states that those who believe, practice and propagate this sutra will never fail to encounter life-threatening dangers. Despite this, once Nichiren Daishonin met with the Lotus Sutra he never begrudged his life to propagate it. The very act of presenting his treatise, *Rissho-ankokuron*, to the Kamakura government was an engagement in the refutation of mistaken views for it admonishes, "If you care anything about your own security you should pray for peace and tranquility throughout the nation. . . Reform your beliefs and embrace the true and good doctrine of the Lotus Sutra." Because of this document and his subsequent propagation of Buddhism Nichiren Daishonin suffered three major persecutions at the hands of the Kamakura government: 1) exile to Izu Peninsula; 2) persecution at Tatsunokuchi beach which nearly resulted in his beheading; and 3) exile to the remote island of Sado. Although the government is obligated to

observe the laws of the land, the Kamakura government incriminated Nichiren Daishonin without so much as an investigation or a trial, and tired, at least on one occasion, to assassinate him. As an expression of his hallowed commitment to propagate the Law he referred to himself in his writings as, "Nichiren, the votary of the Lotus Sutra."

Down the center of the Gohonzon, the scroll that is the object of worship in this faith, reads, *NamuMyohorengkyo Nichiren Zaigoban*. This indicates that we revere Nichiren Daishonin as the True bodhisattva for the Latter Day of the Law, meaning he is the true practitioner. He is the first one who practiced the Lotus Sutra and show us how; he is the one who considered the most important thing for us was to live truthfully with faith in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. His life is the paradigm for attaining enlightenment through faith and practice. *Zaigoban* means that his spirit is still alive and viable within our resolve to keep this faith. He continues to preach and show us this Law of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*. Therefore, based on the concept of a law-centered faith rather than a charismatic-centered faith, such as those beliefs based on Shakyamuni Buddha, god or others, we revere Nichiren Daishonin as the True bodhisttava, who became enlightened, for the Latter Day. He is the one who transmitted the true Law; his life is a living example of living according to the Lotus Sutra. Notwithstanding, it must be said, he is not a charismatic.

## WHY THE LOTUS SUTRA IS SUPERIOR

The sutra preaches the following:

- All living things are equal.
- All living things ( all existence, not just human beings) possess a life equal to that of the Buddha's life.
- Everyone can attain enlightenment by believing in the Lotus Sutra, including evil persons, women, and those whose lives manifest the worlds of Learning and Realization, as well as the world of Animality.

According to the sutras preached before the Lotus Sutra, a woman could not attain enlightenment unless she was born as a man; evil men could only attain enlightenment by eradicating the evil

from their minds entirely. Though it might sound possible in theory, in truth we human beings are emotional animals and therefore cannot always control our own minds and personalities. If women are sinful, how is it possible that men, who are born of women, are clean? Every person is first a human being before the distinction of man or woman. No matter how educated we might be, how much we might value virtue, or how much we might improve our character, we cannot transcend the ten worlds inherent in our lives. The Ten Worlds being Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Tranquility, Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva (aspiration for enlightenment), and Buddhahood (enlightenment). Not even if we practiced ardently could we ever eliminate the worlds of Hell, Hunger, Animality and Anger from our lives.

In accordance with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin teaches us to awaken to the root of our life which, though still consisting of an evil and confused mind, is nothing other than the mind of *Myohorengekyo*, the equivalent of the Buddha's mind. Never fail to remember this whenever you forget it. Believe and transmit it to others. Anyone who strives to do so can attain enlightenment. This is true peace of mind and salvation. It is not for us to ask God or Buddha for aid. It is for us to awaken to the realization that we can save ourselves with the life of the Buddha, *Myohorengekyo*, within us.

Christianity and various other religions encourage one to improve one's character, and to volunteer one's services for others. They preach love without reward. This, however, is not actually the case when believers are always made conscious of the eyes of God upon them. Believers of these faiths are induced to lead a moral life and to try to improve their character so that they will be recognized by God, and deserve to live in heaven as their reward.

Though it is important to value ethics and to improve character by means of religious belief, there are so many people who could never accomplish this due to the extenuating circumstances of their lives, such as their childhood experiences, upbringing, background, other sundry incidents, disease, and uncontrollable character traits. If those who are branded sinners are disqualified from being saved, then none of us can be saved since we all make mistakes. We cannot undo or be absolved of our past wrongdoings, either. The true teaching has to preach that it is possible for all life and phenomena to attain enlightenment. Even for one whose character has been destroyed, or for one who has committed crimes, they too can believe that everyone, including themselves, possess the same life as the Buddha, and can awaken to his or her own preciousness and importance. We must strive to approach the life of *Myohorengekyo* repeatedly whenever we become removed from it. Attain enlightenment by living according to the life of *Myohorengekyo* as much as possible. This

is the religion of the true teaching. If a religion requires us to possess a fine mind in order to be saved, there will be no permanent salvation or healing in the world. It is not for us to ask for aid from God or Buddha, but to awaken to the realization that we can save ourselves with the life of the Buddha, *Myohorengekyo*, existing within our own life. This is the way a true religion should be.

Some may think there is no difference between this religion and Zen Buddhism since Zen teaches that as a result of practicing and sitting in meditation one will awaken to the realization that one is Buddha. In Zen it is said that some people have become awakened in one manner while others, by employing another manner or technique, have reached an awakening. A teaching such as Zen Buddhism, which professes various manners in which to reach enlightenment, is a wrong teaching. By contrast, the Lotus Sutra teaches that there is one correct way for everyone to reach enlightenment. That is, with faith and practice of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* everyone can awaken to the life of *Myohorengekyo* within. In Zen Buddhism it is thought that once awakened one becomes a living god or bodhisattva beyond delusion. This belief is also wrong. A living god or bodhisattva beyond delusion can never exist, and there is no need for such an existence.

Any human being can become spiritually awakened, and then deluded again. We alternate between awakening and delusion. We neither remain awakened like an inert stone, nor deluded like an inert stone. Those who claim to be awakened are either pretending or deceiving themselves. It is convenient to pretend to have become a living god or bodhisattva in order to maintain a religious organization. Thus all the religions of the world never fail to end up with a charismatic leader eventually. The Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, rejects the charisma of the Buddha, even though he was the one who preached the teaching. The Lotus Sutra is an epic and epoch-making doctrine which appeals to us to return to the Law, and specifies that the mind of all Buddhas is *Myohorengekyo*.

Many people fancy themselves as believers and practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. And yet, in the Soka Gakkai the charismatic leader, Daisaku Ikeda is treated as a living bodhisattva; whereas the Taiseikiji priesthood openly claims that Nikken Abe, as are past high priests, is the Nichiren Daishonin of the time. Thus even when we think we are practicing the Lotus Sutra, it can become very warped when confused.

What did the Buddha believe and practice to become enlightened? It was nothing other than the Law of *Myoho-renge-kyo*. The minds of all the bodhisattvas in Japan including Dainichi Buddha



of the Shingon sect and Amida Buddha of the Jodo sect are all derived from the law of *Myohorenge-kyo*. So is their practice. What did Jesus believe and practice to become Christ? It was the Law that both Buddha and God believed and practiced. Likewise, all living things should pursue, believe and practice this Law. Worshipping Buddha or God will never make it possible to reach their state of mind. And to teach that one is a servant of God in heaven is proof of not being a true religion. Without a teaching that we ourselves can become Buddha or God, where can we find salvation? The Buddha depicted in the Lotus Sutra does not claim that he created the world. That is because the true Law is nobody's possession and everyone's at the same time. Buddha revealed to us the Law which is the basic core of all living things; he showed us with his life an example of how people can fuse the Law and their way of living. Initially, all bodhisattvas were ordinary people like ourselves who believed and practiced. Therefore the belief that some entity created the world is both false and vainglorious.

### **THE LAW CAME FIRST BUDDHA CAME LATER**

All living things live according to the laws of Nature. But since human beings are the only life form that gets lost by resisting Nature, the existence of Buddha is indispensable to the human world. There is no need to preach the correct way to live to animals and plants. If God had created the law, it means he would have lived in a void as the sole, superhuman entity before the human world began. There is a legend in Japan that the Japanese islands were created by drops from the hands of two gods, *Izanagi-no-mikoto* and *Isanami-no-mikoto*, when they scooped up some water from the ocean. It seems that God in any country created everything. The question is, who created the Gods?

In the early years of human existence people killed and robbed each other and lived like animals according to their basic urges. Buddha came along and preached that living in this way was not the purpose of human life, human life bore much greater importance. The Law transmitted by the Buddha revealed the importance of life as being to support each other's life, rather than to kill each other. The true purpose in being born as a human being is to believe in and chant the Law of *Namumyohorenge-kyo*. This is what Buddha transmitted, and this was his will. The ultimate purpose of the Buddha's advent was to bring about the "Enlightenment of all living things." This enlightenment is not realized at death. It is an enlightenment achieved during our lifetime by exerting ourselves to reach an awakening to the Buddha's life of *Myohorengkyo* within our hearts.

## SUMMARY

1. A charismatic who pretends to be a living god or bodhisattva is not necessary in this world.
2. A teaching based on a charismatic personality does not save "all living things."
3. The objective in life is not to become a person of moral character and ethics by removing the evil and delusion from one's mind and thereby achieve an absolute, pure mind.
4. Enlightenment can be attained by living according to the Law of *Myohorengekyo* without eliminating evil and delusion from one's mind.
5. Intrinsically, since the beginningless past, all living things are equal and possess the Buddha's life.
6. There is no salvation in a religion where an individual can, by believing in it, only be a follower, a disciple or a servant. The true teaching will result in salvation by becoming Buddha or God through belief.
7. The Buddha did not create the law, he transmitted it. The claim that God created the world is false!