

THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

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LIVING THE LIFE OF NAMU- MYOHO-RENGE-KYO

Reverend Raido Hirota,

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QUESTION: If we are on the right path, why do we have to face the Devil of the Sixth Heaven¹? Nichiren Daishonin² says we always have to be prepared to face negativity and obstacles. I do not understand this sense of fatality. I am not chanting for more difficulties, which I think prevents me from being totally free in my prayers.

Reverend Raido Hirota (RH): Buddhism explains that within each individual's life there are ten worlds: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddhahood. The first six worlds, Hell to Heaven, are like a wheel. It is within these worlds that the common mortal or unenlightened beings transmigrate. These six worlds are called the six lower paths. The six lower paths are the realms of confusion which keeps spinning like a wheel.

The sixth world (Heaven), which is called *Tenjo* in Japanese, is the world of happiness. For example, if you win the lottery, you will become really happy about winning. Or, let's say, you had feelings for someone and you found out that that

¹ Devil of the Sixth Heaven - works to obstruct Buddhist practice and saps the life force from other beings.

² Nichiren - Daishonin - (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namu-myohoho-rence-kyo imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

person also loves you. So everything is nice and rosy, and you feel happy to be alive. That sense of happiness is the world of *Tenjo* or Heaven. But from the Buddha's point of view, the world of happiness is still among the six lower worlds. It is still in the realm of confusion. There are still four more levels above it to reach. This world of happiness is, from the Buddha's point of view, still a part of the wheel—still just spinning and repeating the cycles.

Let's say, for example, that you have something that you have to master and it is very difficult. You try hard but it is so difficult that you don't want to do it. However, if you stop right here, that's it. You're not going to advance any further than this point. So the level where you say, "I'm so happy; this is so good" – this is not the goal. It is not the end. There are higher levels that you want to reach. Seeking for that, longing for that, and the willingness to continue, is the purpose of having faith. You have to strive for the realms from the seventh world (Learning) and above. There are ten worlds in one's life according to these teachings. The reason you have faith and practice is to strive for the higher worlds: Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

Believer 1 (B1): Could you explain the spinning wheel? Does it mean the worlds just spin around? The levels spin around?

RH: Using the metaphor of a wheel indicates that you are not going anywhere. It means that the individual is repeating the cycle of the six lower worlds over and over and over again, and not going any further than that. That is what is indicated by the wheel. It's spinning, but it's not going anywhere.

Namu-myoho-renge-kyo³ helps you realize that there are different worlds beyond these six lower worlds. Namu-myoho-renge-kyo helps you break through the cycle of the six lower worlds and enter the realm of faith. This is explained by the Japanese term *gedatsu* which means to leave, get out or escape.

Believer 2 (B2): So that is what we are doing when we chant?

RH: Just because you chant doesn't mean you will automatically escape from the six lower worlds. But by chanting you receive the key to realizing that perhaps there are four more levels or worlds. The highest level is realizing Buddhahood.

When you chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, if you are just saying it, it doesn't really mean anything. But by saying it with the intent or desire that "I am going to live like Namu-myoho-renge-kyo," it does have meaning. For example, if you write, or say to another person, "I am never going to lie again," it doesn't mean that you will not ever lie again. You can write it, but if you are not going to live by your words, then it has no meaning. It is the same with chanting. Just because you're saying it, it doesn't mean that you can escape the six lower worlds. But if you are chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, and you live like that, then you will be able to achieve *gedatsu*—or escape the six lower worlds.

B1: How do you live like that?

RH: On the subject of chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and living like Namu-myoho-renge-kyo Nichiren Daishonin wrote many writings—writings concerned with how to live like a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra. When you read the goshō of Nichiren Daishonin, which are about the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, you will begin to see and understand the details of how the Daishonin lived his life – by which principles of the Lotus Sutra he lived his life as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra. Then you take that in and apply it to your daily life and thereby live the life of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

³ Namu-myoho-renge-kyo - the Mystic Law; the ultimate Law of life and the universe; the Buddha nature in all things.

B1: Could you give us an example from some of Nichiren’s writings of how to live one’s life?

RH: After gongyo⁴ you recite the 24 Characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyo⁵. The message contained in that recitation is one example that you can apply to your daily life.

B2: The last sentence of this question says, “I am not chanting for more difficulties, which I think prevents me from being totally free in my prayers.” Should we chant for difficulties? What do you think of this statement?

RH: What kind of chant is that, to ask for more difficulties?

B3: Generally speaking, isn’t it a part of Buddhism, the Buddhist teachings, to ask for hardship, difficulties and suffering?

RH: In Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism⁶ austerities and ascetic practices are not practiced. Nichiren Shoshu does not believe in precepts, ascetic practices, and austerities that come from the outside. In Nichiren Shoshu the true faith and true practice is the wholehearted willingness, the desire coming from your heart that you want to live the life of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. So asking for more difficulties is not a part of this practice. For example, when you do Odaimoku⁷ no one else can tell you how much you need to chant. Only you know how much will make you feel good and how much will make you feel at peace.

I may contradict myself by saying this, but I suggest to people that they do at least 15 minutes of Odaimoku. The reason I suggest 15 minutes is because: a) the daimoku is the core of the faith; and b) unless you do at least 15 minutes, you will feel you want to stop now. You want to quit. When you do 15 minutes the feeling that you want to quit will surface, then you will pass that point. After that you will get the effect of chanting Odaimoku. In a person’s heart there is one side that says I want to have faith, I want to believe. Then there is another side that says, Oh, I don’t want to chant. These two opposing thoughts live together, side by side, in the same place. I wish each of you will go past the feeling of wanting to quit. But I’m not going to call each of you to make sure you do at least 15 minutes at each gongyo⁸. But as your personal goal, I wish you will face the desire to quit, then go past it.



⁴ Gosho – writings of Nichiren Daishonin

⁵ Bodhisattva Jofukyo - Bodhisattva Fukyo – a bodhisattva described in the 20th chapter of the Lotus Sutra who revered everyone for their inherent Buddha nature.

⁶ Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism - the Buddhist religion that embraces and recites the true Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo as the original cause of enlightenment, and believes that Nichiren Daishonin is the true Buddha.

⁷ Odaimoku - Daimoku – chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

⁸Gongyo - 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 the Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

ON THE 24 CHARACTERS OF BODHISATTVA JOFUKYO

我深敬汝等。不敢輕慢。
所謂者何。汝等皆行菩薩道。當得作佛。

The 24 characters in Chinese



Ware fukaku nanjirao uyamau aete kyoman sezu yuen wa i kan naji ra mina bosatsu no michi-o gyojite masa ni sabutsu suru koto-o ubeshito.

The 24 characters in Japanese romaji



I respect everyone deeply; I do not despise anyone, not even a little, or look down on anyone with contempt, because everyone has the capacity to become a Buddha of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, if they believe in Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, and practice.

The English interpretation of the 24 characters, which is recited in Sanbo-in temple at the end of gongyo.



“Bodhisattva Fukyo of old said that all people have the Buddha nature and that, if they embrace the Lotus Sutra, they will never fail to attain Buddhahood. He further stated that to slight a person is to slight the Buddha himself. Thus, his practice was to revere all people. He revered even those who did not embrace the Lotus Sutra because they too had the Buddha nature and might someday believe in the sutra.

Nichiren Daishonin
“The Fourteen Slanders”⁹



⁹ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 3, pp. 207-208.

It is true that “Namu-myoho-renge-kyo” does not appear in the original text of the Lotus Sutra.

However, in the hope that believers would have a better understanding of the text, I loosely translated *bosatsu no michi-o gyojite* into English as “to become a Buddha of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.” *Bosatsu* in this context means Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and *michi*, which means path in Japanese, means practice in Buddhism. So *basatsu no michi* is nothing other than the practice of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. Nichiren Daishonin practiced it himself, believed in it and taught it to others. That is why I translated this phrase as the “practice of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.”

“*Masani Sabutsu Surukotowo Ubeshi*” (which means, there is no doubt that you can become a Buddha) is the same as what Ellen noted, that *kai ji go nyu* is the Buddha’s life of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo itself. That is why I loosely translated it as the “Buddha of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.” This is understood in the Japanese text, but it must be spelled out in English in order to have the same understanding.

It is not my intention to deceive or misguide believers. If there is anyone who feels that Namu-myoho-renge-kyo is wrong and the Buddha of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo is wrong, please tell me what is right. And if anyone knows the practice that leads to “Buddhahood” other than Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, please tell me.

Rev. Hirota Raido, Sanbo-in

ENCOUNTERING CONFLICT AS A PRACTITIONER

Reverend Raido Hirota

East Stroudsburg, PA

June 2009

QUESTION: How do we pray for someone?

RH: Don’t forget that your life, the other person’s life and all life have the Buddha’s life. You must have courage to follow through with your faith and practice. And you must have courage to tell others about Daishonin’s teaching.

B4: What if we’re mad at someone, can we do selective praying? How do we pray honestly for someone that we have problems with? How do I treat everyone with the Buddha’s life when I don’t like everyone?

RH: Many of you have experienced the Soka Gakkai's¹⁰ teachings, which put some weight on hatred or vengeance. When you pray for people who don't like you, or people you don't like, pray to make the relationship better or pray to build a friendship with them. Do not pray or wish for your enemy's misfortune. Your belief should never be based on hatred or evil or hostility or discrimination, or power or vengeance, or being jealous of other's happiness. You should never be motivated to pray because of such emotions.

B4: It's not that I would ever pray for someone's harm. It's more that I want to know how to deal with my ill will towards a person, and honestly say I will really pray for his happiness. That's my own struggle within my own heart—within my own life. It is to find compassion for those people who conjure up those feelings. In terms of my own growth, my own enlightenment, I know that those feelings are in the way. How can I transform it and deal with it? But, then again, sometimes I don't want to.

RH: When Nichiren Daishonin was exiled to Sado Island, he already had many believers in Kamakura, which was the seat of the Shogunate government at the time. Many of his believers were samurai, and some had positions of power. So they got together and submitted a petition to the government requesting a lessening of the Daishonin's sentence to shorten his exile on Sado. When Nichiren Daishonin heard about this, he strongly objected to it and rejected that kind of support from his believers. He responded to their efforts by saying that if anyone of them tries something like that again, they will no longer be his disciples. Of course, the accusations against the Daishonin were completely false. But he accepted it. He didn't object or try to dispute them. He felt he must have persecuted believers of the Lotus Sutra in his former life, and this was the retribution. When he was preaching the Lotus Sutra in Kamakura, he was stoned and spat upon. He thought he must have done the same to believers of the Lotus Sutra in past existences, so he had no right to avenge it. He also believed that the Buddhist gods, who protect the Law of the Lotus Sutra, allowed him to survive the attempted beheading at Tatsunokuchi. So there must be something the Buddhist gods wanted him to learn on Sado. This is what the Daishonin wrote in his letter to his believers. It is written in the sutra that the votaries of the Lotus Sutra would encounter persecutions that would jeopardize their lives. This is clearly stated in the Sutra; and that every true practitioner of the Lotus Sutra would experience it.

So, when you encounter conflict as a practitioner, you should never begin to understand it or deal with it by accusing others, or blaming others for the conflict. First, start with reflecting on yourself. Even though you may be right or correct in the situation, there will still be something wrong with you.

One aspect of the Soka Gakkai is that they don't reflect on themselves. They never admit that there is something wrong with them. They also cast aspersions on others—always blaming others for their problems. Even with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra: they omit some teachings, but include those teachings which are agreeable and useful to them, and supports their behavior. As a result, the whole body of believers of the Soka Gakkai is wrong. They are following mistaken beliefs.

QUESTION: Nichiren Daishonin speaks of the opponents of the Lotus Sutra, but it is difficult to recognize them. How do we identify the enemies of the Lotus Sutra?

¹⁰ Soka Gakkai - SGI – a lay organization that wrongly uses some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in its own philosophy and practice.

RH: A person, who has a good personality, is rational, and who cares about others can quickly change and become so angry when you discuss *myoho* that you cannot continue the discussion. He may even start cursing. That's how I judge an enemy of the Lotus Sutra.

Some people are easy to anger. It is a personality trait. But if you are being attacked, I recommend that you try to engage in a civil discussion about your thoughts. Don't get upset. If the person believes in a different religion, just try to talk.

Sometimes time is limited. There may not be enough time to have a discussion or to talk. But even if you don't have enough time to talk, you should never be rude. Try not to be dismissive. I often have Jehovah Witnesses come to my temple and try to engage me in an argument. Sometimes I don't have time, so I tell them, I'm sorry, I don't have time right now. At other times, when I am free, I welcome them in and gently try to talk with them. The Soka Gakkai also comes to the temple. When I have time I also welcome them inside the temple, and will talk with them for one or two hours. Even if they want to go home, I keep them there until I am finished.

B2: There's a guy I know who was in SGI but now doesn't practice with anyone. He chants, but for all intents and purposes does not really practice. However, he represents to SGI that he is following you, Rev. Hirota. When he talks to SGI members, they speak calmly and controlled, but he loses his cool and starts swearing at them.

RH: When I confront Gakkai members who come to my temple, even I, honestly speaking, feel my blood pressure rising. When I left Taisekiji temple, due to a difference in understanding the faith, Gakkai members and Taisekiji members tried to undermine my reputation and credibility with false stories. They reported that I slept with someone else's wife, or that I stole money from another temple. They spread those stories to sully my name and reputation. The Gakkai will do anything to undermine those who oppose the Gakkai. I try to understand how people who claim to practice Namu-myoho-rence-kyo can act like that.

ON ANALYZING THE WORDS OF GONGYO

Reverend Raido Hirota

East Stroudsburg, PA

June 2009

QUESTION: As we recite Gongyo, should we know the meanings of particular passages or terms? If so, which passages or terms are particularly important for us to know the meanings of?

RH: As I've mentioned before, the Lotus Sutra has 69,384 Chinese characters. Each character is the Buddha's word—a golden saying, which cannot be put in order of importance. Every character is important. Since my answer is insufficient, I will quote from the sutra passages we read everyday: 1)

In the beginning of the *Juryo* chapter¹¹ is the parable of the Excellent Physician which states that Namu-myoho-rence-kyo is good medicine for all sickness. It further states that all life is eternal, ever-abiding, and without beginning or end. 2) In the *Hoben* chapter¹² we recite the *kyunozo*¹³ which says that there is absolute equality and no difference between the Buddha and ordinary people, and it also alludes to the Law of *ichinen sanzen*.¹⁴ 3) *Ichidaiji innen* and *kai ji go nyu* in the *seo-ge* are teachings which deepen our heart of faith. We cannot recite these perfunctorily.

B4: Our minds wander as we recite gongyo. What brings us back? If we don't understand every word that we say, we might start thinking about what I have to do today, or our daily life. Should we learn the actual meanings of the words so that we know the meaning when we say them? Or what should we really think about when chanting?

RH: When I recite gongyo, I don't focus on the meaning of every word. I pray for the enlightenment of all living things (*issai shujo jobutsu*), including myself. That is the ultimate purpose of chanting. Of course, many times I struggle with other thoughts while I chant. But when I realize my mind is wandering, I try to return to the ultimate purpose. I try to remember that I'm chanting for the enlightenment of all living things.

QUESTION: The Daishonin refers to the Gohonzon¹⁵ as “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind”. Can you help us understand what this means? What should we “observe” when devoting ourselves to Gohonzon? Does it mean we should observe our thoughts, or how the ten worlds¹⁶ appear in our lives as we chant in front of the Gohonzon?

RH: It's not observing the mind, that is not the right word. What is the purpose of observing? You can experience Namu-myoho-rence-kyo, the Buddha's life, in the core of your life. That is what is called seeing or perceiving. *Kanjin* really means to see or perceive. When you do gongyo but don't feel like doing it, you feel so refreshed and pure in your body when you finish. I cannot give you an explanation for this feeling. This feeling is proof that you are experiencing the Buddha's life. Therefore, if your daimoku is used to fulfill your desires, and your chanting is full of hate, contempt and revenge, like the Gakkai, then your practice is not the Daishonin's practice.

The Chinese characters for the word *kanjin*, which describes what we do when we face Gohonzon and chant, means seeing the mind. The mind here is not based on your own desires. It is the mind based on the Buddha's heart. Referring back to the last question, if you delve into or analyze the

¹¹ Juryo chapter – “The Life Span of the Thus Come One” – the 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the most important chapter in the essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra where Shakyamuni Buddha reveals that he first attained enlightenment in the remote past and not in this lifetime.

¹² Hoben chapter – Expedient Means – the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which Shakyamuni declares that all Buddhas appear in the world solely to enable all living beings to realize Buddhahood, and that all beings have the potential to realize enlightenment.

¹³ Kyunozo – the enumeration of the Ten Factors in the Hoben (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra; *nyo ze so, nyoze sho, nyo ze tai*, etc.

¹⁴ Ichinen sanzen - - a single life moment contains three thousand realms of existence, or within a single life moment a single life entity contains all life.

¹⁵ Gohonzon - the scroll that is the mandala or object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and represents the Law of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo.

¹⁶ Ten Worlds - - potential conditions of life inherent in each individual. They are Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Tranquility or Humanity, Heaven or Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

meaning of each single word that we chant, it may or may not reinforce your belief, but it does not change the meaning of what the Law is. For example, whether one who has a dollar bill is wise or foolish, it doesn't change the value of the dollar. Likewise, the value of the teaching never changes, but how you make use of it is up to you. If the person is a fool, he may use it in the wrong way or for the wrong purpose. If the person is wise, the person will use it for good purpose or in the correct way.

Three of the four pillars of Buddhism are faith, practice and study. Study is not easy. You cannot achieve it overnight. We need to work on it continuously. To be a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra means to uphold the four pillars of Buddhism: faith, practice, study and shakubuku.

ON PRACTICING ALONE

Reverend Raido Hirota

East Stroudsburg, PA

June 2009

QUESTION: I have a friend with whom I practiced True Buddhism while we were both in SGI many years ago. In 1980, we both left SGI. For the last almost 30 years, he has been practicing Buddhism essentially by himself, diligently doing Gongyo every day, and obviously benefiting from his faith. Is it alright to practice by oneself, or do we need priests and fellow believers?

RH: Among many believers there are some who can practice alone. Outside of the practice, there are some people who like to live in the mountains or on an island alone. Some people are self-sufficient. They don't need anyone. But there are only a few people like this. Most people are collaborative, cooperate with others, help each other and realize that one can't live alone. They form couples, have children and evolve into a society and a country.

Why did Shakyamuni choose to form a sangha or group of disciples as a religious community united in faith? Shakyamuni focused on prevention of, and admonished against the disruption of the unity of believers. He warned that this should never happen. Then the question arose: If you have to make such an admonition, why should you form a group in the first place? (Christianity says people are very evil. Then why should we make people?) There are pros and cons to a group of people. A couple, man and wife, brothers and sisters, family, organization, and country—all these are groups of people and have a good side and a bad side.

Individuals have the Ten Worlds, so does an organization have the Ten Worlds. When you look at someone it's like looking in a mirror. You may think, if I were you, I would do it this way or that way. I agree...disagree. If I were in that situation would I lie and runaway? Or would I have the courage to say, that's my fault and apologize. If you cannot see things in yourself, you will see yourself through others and learn. Foolishness, weakness, craftiness, wavering or doubt, all of these you can find in yourself by looking at others. That is why we can encourage, remonstrate, and guide

each other. Of course, there will be people who will appear in a group who deceive others with lies and sometimes mismanage or lead a group with the wrong teaching.

A religious group is for practicing a religion and not for making a strong, big organization. It must not have power nor exert pressure to make a divine leader or god-like figure.

In this group we must always remind ourselves of the teaching, “follow the Law not the person.” Always ask yourself is this group, and am I practicing Daishonin’s teachings? Don’t be blind. Don’t leave everything up to the group and the leader. It is up to each one of you believers to make a good group of Daishonin’s followers. You must know that the purpose of the group is to awaken your heart, not eliminate your heart.

You can practice alone when there is not much going on around you. For awhile there will be peace and calm. But in time the Devil of the Sixth Heaven will start to challenge you and lead you the wrong way, or cause you to stop practicing. Sometimes when you are doing wrong, you believe you are doing right. Or you believe you are doing what is right when you are doing wrong. When you are practicing by yourself, your practice is easy. When you realized that you were doing what was wrong in the Gakkai, you talked with a number of people and determined on your own that you should leave the Gakkai. That is why you are here now. If you are practicing on your own, you don’t know where you’re at or where you’re going. There will be many things you will misunderstand. The percentage of this is so high that you cannot practice to become enlightened.

B5: A friend who I shakubukued years ago practices all the time on his own. He finally came to visit, and I was shocked to see the condition of his accessories of practice. He took out his juzu and there were 7 beads. The book looked as though it had been twisted by pliers. The rhythm of gongyo was off. I realized this was very serious. It’s amazing how you can go your own way and you don’t realize these things are very important.

RH: This could be a general lesson about life. If a person lives by him or herself, the person could be so self-centered that if he goes into the company of others, he will behave strangely and look odd, and not be able to see how strange he appears to others. If a person’s practice is wrong, and he practices by himself, he will tend to think this is correct, this is right, and he will not be able to see his mistakes by himself. He will think that others are wrong, not him. Such a person can be so obstinate that even when friends and other believers point out how wrong he is, he cannot accept it or listen to the advice.

There is a word in chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra that means you should always keep your mind soft, accepting or flexible. Similarly, when a child is growing up, he should learn how to play with other kids and how to play by himself. Likewise, we need to know how to practice by ourselves in the face of opposition to our belief. You need to have the strength and courage to keep your faith and practice by yourself. But at the same time, to avoid being stubborn and having wrong belief, you need to know how to practice with other believers. It’s all about balance.

In my temple in Japan, there is one person who complains about the other believers. He complains that a certain person is always off tone when he chants, so he doesn’t want to practice with that person. And when I listen to this complainer chant, when it is just he and I or he and a few others, he is also off tone. Everyone has negative traits, as well as good ones. But everyone has something negative about them. Each of us tends to think, “I’m right. I’m correct.” But actually we all have bad points. We need to cooperate with others, sustain each other and advise each other.

B6: A friend of mind was a Buddhist before she died. The husband is not a Buddhist. The daughter is a Buddhist, but belongs to a different sect. The mother's Gohonzon is still in the house. I told the daughter to return the Gohonzon to Nichiren Shoshu. The daughter refused because she says the Gohonzon belongs in her parent's house. Both the father and the daughter are resisting. The situation is very upsetting to me, because with the Gohonzon enshrined in a home where it is not being chanted to I feel that the mother has never been buried.

RH: When Gohonzon is received from a temple, some people think, "This is my possession. I own this." But Gohonzon itself is a representation of the Law. You cannot personalize the Law. In speaking about the physical existence of Gohonzon, you are just borrowing it temporarily from the temple. So once a person passes away, the Gohonzon should be returned to the temple. The same is true with your friend's Gohonzon. It should be returned to the temple. If no family member is practicing to Gohonzon, it must be returned to the temple. If a family member cannot be relied on to do that, one must make arrangements before one dies to have a believer return Gohonzon to the priest or the temple and remove all the butsugu as well.

If we take Nichiren Daishonin's life as a role model, he advised the Kamakura government to believe in the Lotus Sutra. He warned the government three times and urged them to take faith. But they refused to heed Daishonin's remonstrations and pleas to take faith. So Daishonin chose to retire to Mt. Minobu and continue his practice there. So taking Daishonin as the example, if you see someone making mistakes, it is first your responsibility to advise and warn the person sincerely and compassionately at least three times as Nichiren Daishonin did. But after you have tried at least three times and the person is stubborn and doesn't heed your advice, it is then that person's responsibility. Another way is to put it into a will.

A BELIEVER'S DILEMMA

Reverend Raido Hirota

Fukuyama City, Japan

February 2011

QUESTION: What I seek is simplicity and truth. What is in my heart is a great desire to live a pure and honest life. What I desire most in my heart is to be part of a community wherein I can share the truths of life with other like-minded people and hope that my family can be a part of it too. There is pain and sadness in my heart when I think about Nichiren Daishonin's legacy. Because it is anything but simple—it is very complicated. What would he think if he were alive today to see all the in-fighting and claims of superiority between all of his disciples? Amongst all the different Nichiren schools of Buddhism, who is right? Is it Shoshinkai¹⁷? Is it Taiseki-ji¹⁸? Is it Kempon Hokke-shu¹⁹? Is

¹⁷ Shoshin-kai - the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.

it Nishiyama Honmonji²⁰? Is it Nichiren-shu²¹? My heart (and mind) is tormented by these questions! I am simply trying to seek the truth. From a doctrinal standpoint, and based on all the authentic writings of Nichiren Daishonin it is quite clear that the Nichiren Shu lineages are correct. They interpret The Daishonin's teachings exactly as they were written. I'm not suggesting that they do the correct practice but history proves that the way they define the three treasures is in line with the way the Daishonin taught them. Including the way Nikko Shonin²² taught them. If we look at historical fact we see that Nikko Shonin (after he left Minobu) founded many temples. Taisekiji, Omosu Seminary (Kitayama Honmonji) and others. Later after he passed away more major temples were founded by his disciples, in his name. All of them were in agreement until roughly 200 years after Nikko Shonin passed away. Sometime in the 1400's Taisekiji began to change its doctrine. It changed its view of the three treasures. Can you please explain this? All the other Nikko Shonin based Temples did not go along with Taisekiji. I find this very confusing. I am simply trying to find out the truth and trying to understand what was in the Daishonin's heart and Nikko Shonin's heart. I want to know how the Daishonin wants us to practice. That comes from my heart.

Rev Hirota, the way I handled this situation was wrong. I can not change that. What I am trying to do now is take responsibility for a mistake I made. The reason I went back to the Taisekiji branch temple here was simply a desire to be part of an actual temple. A physical thing. As you have pointed out in the past I am a weak person. Easily swayed. Always wanting what's best for my family and I guess it seemed like a good idea to bring them to an actual Temple. I know it's hard to understand. I know I should have talked to you first. It's not just based on my 'mood' as you had suggested. It was an impulsive move on my part. That is a big problem in my life. Acting out on impulses rather than well thought out decisions. It's a bad habit. I'm not trying to make excuses. It's just reality. It can sometimes have a good effect. It led me to you! If I had not googled 'Nikko Shonin's lineages' I would never have found Udumbara Foundation. There was something in my heart that prompted me to do that. I am simply trying to understand what the Daishonin would do and want me to do in light of the many, many Schools of Buddhism that teach his doctrine. There are a lot of questions about Nichiren Shoshu. In my heart I feel connected to the Nichiren Shoshu practice. Doctrinally speaking there are a lot of problems.

[I returned to Nichiren Shoshu temple in the fall.] However it did not take long for me to realize my mistake. The only thing they talk about at the Temple whether it be a published speech of the High Priest or a lecture of the Chief Priest, is increasing their membership. In fact they have added a prayer which specifically states to pray to double the membership by a certain date. This approach to Buddhism does not resonate with me. Chanting in a group of 100 people along to the sound of the drum absolutely resonates with me. I yearn for that. But what they are teaching doesn't feel like the Daishonin's Buddhism. I never heard anyone refer to the High Priest as a Buddha but they do say that without him one cannot attain enlightenment. That he and only he carries the "lifeblood" of the entity of the Law. I don't think Nichiren Daishonin taught that one single person carries this "lifeblood". I have many questions about this. It is the same conclusion I came to when I first contacted this group 2

¹⁸ Taisekiji - the Head Temple of Nichiren Shoshu. The organization of priests and believers associated with the Head Temple.

¹⁹ Kempon Hokke Shu - the Sect of the Lotus Sutra, revealing the Original Buddha

²⁰ Nishiyama Homonji – one of the eight temples from the lineage of Nikko Shonin, which is now a part of Nichiren Shu.

²¹ Nichiren Shu -- a sect of Nichiren Buddhism that chants Namu-myoho-renge-kyo but believes in Shakyamuni as the true Buddha.

²² 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.

years ago. I am going around in circles. My heart truly yearns to practice with a Temple where-in the traditions of Nichiren Shoshu are followed both doctrinally and through actual practice.

RH: Thank you for embracing the faithful courage to write back. I offer my heartfelt respect and gratitude to you.

I don't wish for the believers to be fighting each other or to be divided. However, the reality of it is exactly that. But that's not the fault of Nichiren Daishonin or the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, Nikko Shonin, or Nichimoku Shonin.

Even when Nichiren Daishonin was alive, there were people who didn't hear him, and they objected and left him.

When I do "Shakubuku"²³, people around me say: "Come back after Taiseki-ji, Soka Gakkai, and Shoshinkai have resolved their conflict. Don't confuse us."

After Nichiren Daishonin passed on, Nissho, Nichiro, Niko, Nitcho, Nichiji — in other words, the 5 senior disciples besides Nikko Shonin — said that they were monks of the Tendai sect, and the Buddha is Shakyamuni. They claimed that they were the persons who best understood the dharma²⁴ of Nichiren Daishonin. That's because the Kamakura Shogunate branded Nichiren's disciples as criminals, and if you were one of his disciples, your life would be at risk, your reputation would decline, and you wouldn't be able to foster a number of believers. So, they thought the teacher, Nichiren, didn't make a great move. One would have to be a supporter of the Shogunate, and become a person in position of authority. That is the origin of Nichiren-shu.

In the midst of that, Nikko Shonin was the only one who claimed that he was a disciple of Nichiren Daishonin. He also made the point that in Mappo, Nichiren Daishonin is the True Buddha and you can't throw away or bend the dharma of Nichiren Daishonin for the purpose of growing the number of believers.

Having this before one's very eyes, it seems to be nonsense that one would be at a loss. Seeing this confusion, Nichimoku Shonin²⁵ is the one who thought that the truth is in Nikko Shonin, and he took actions based on that. In other words, it's not just the monks who need to get a grip, but also, the believers have to think of where Nichiren Daishonin's dharma lies by using the measurement of "*Eho Fue Nin*" (follow the Law, not the person). Not by getting lost, but by searching for it. Just as you felt a sense of discomfort at your temple in the dharma of Nichiren Daishonin, it doesn't say that there is a special person who is like the Buddha; nor does it teach us that that person's interpretation of "right" or "hell" is sovereign.

You asked "How does Nichiren Daishonin want us to practice the teachings?" In every sentient being, there is a Buddha nature. Do not lose sight of this, or get lost. Live appropriately as a being who hosts the Buddha nature within. There is no particular, absolute existence that is like the Buddha or a god. All life is connected, and they are all equal. Having that as the basis of the teaching, carry that out

²³ Shakubuku – refute erroneous teachings and point out the correct teachings.

²⁴ Dharma – the Buddha's Law, Buddha's teachings

²⁵ Nichimoku Shonin - Niidakyo Ajari Nichimoku (1260-1333) – 3rd High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who inherited the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin from Nikko Shonin.

in life, and “shakubuku” based on that. That is what Nichiren Daishonin wants you to do. Until now, I have consistently explained this to you all.

No doubt there would be conflict and separation as long as there are people who deny this and claim that his and the organization’s way of thinking is the dharma of Nichiren Daishonin. Those people are Daisaku Ikeda, the people at Taiseki-ji, and the thinking of Nichiren Shu.

In the midst of conflict, I’ve never lost my way, or thought of myself as a troubled victim of such confusion (in other words, it’s not somebody else’s fault).

Even though you have a habit of impulsive behavior, I have no intention of denying *or* thinking that it is a sin. I do think there are many great things that come from impulsiveness and fervor. However, as a believer, you can’t act impulsively, as it results in regret.

Even if you are a type of a person who doesn’t mind having your room being messy, it is unacceptable to keep the revered Gohonzon’s Butsudan area unclean. It’s the same thing. You can’t become Buddha by having your way of thinking as a core value. You *can* become Buddha by having Buddha’s teachings at the core of your living.

Does that make sense?

I don’t have the right to forgive or not forgive you.

Until you have clear understanding of the dharma of Nichiren Daishonin, and have it set in your heart and in focus, I believe you need to face your butsudan without the revered Gohonzon. You must think deeply, and take time to develop your self-trust for your devotion, which will not be swayed by impulsiveness. Considering the weight of your actions, I believe you will understand such consequences.



THE RULES OF MEMBESHIP IN SANBO-IN TEMPLE

1. I will maintain strong faith and strictly guard against slander.
2. I will practice without seeking worldly fortune.
3. I will not use Daishonin's Buddhism to gain profit.
4. The foundation of my faith must be firmly rooted in following the Law of Nichiren Daishonin. I will not assert power and authority like Taiseki-ji, nor imitate or create a hierarchy like that of the Soka Gakkai.
5. I will respect the Buddha nature of others, and will not discriminate or harbor contempt for others.
6. I will strive in the three pillars of Buddhism – faith, practice and study – towards the noble goal of shakubuku and propagation of True Buddhism.
7. I will not give Gohonzons to others; I will not receive Gohonzons from others; I will not sell Gohonzons or buy Gohonzons.
8. If I have questions or doubts about the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, I will not read writings from other religions.
9. The names of translators will be clearly stated on all guidance from the priest, and permission to publish or disseminate anything must be obtained from the priest.
10. The use of the name of Sanbo-in or the priest Rev. Raido Hirota to defend one's assertions is prohibited.
11. I will not interfere with any person who wishes to pursue Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and seek enlightenment.
12. Since there are many activities which have to be carried out, it will be necessary, year by year, to evaluate and reconsider yearly expenses to determine the amount of monthly dues required by each believer to accomplish our goals.

Risshu-e
April 28, 1253

The day Nichiren Daishonin first invoked
Namu-myoho-renge-kyo



GOSHO SELECTION

EXCERPT

“Letter to Nii-ama”²⁶

....

.... O-ama [Gozen] has asked me to inscribe the Gohonzon for her, but I am troubled by her request. The reason is as follows. This Gohonzon was never mentioned in the writings of the many Buddhist scholars who traveled from India to China or in those of the priests who journeyed from China to India. All the objects of worship ever enshrined in the temples throughout India are described without exception in the *Daito Saiiki Ki*²⁷, the *Jion Den*²⁸, and the *Dento Roku*²⁹, [and this Gohonzon is not among them]. Nor have I found it mentioned among the objects of worship of the various temples which were described by those sages who traveled from China to Japan or by those wise men who went from Japan to China. Since all the records of the first temples in Japan such as Gango-ji, Shitenno-ji and other temples as well as many histories, beginning with the *Nihon Shoki*³⁰, name them without omission, the objects of worship in these temples are clearly known, but this Gohonzon has never been listed among them.

People may say in doubt: "It was probably not expounded in the sutras or treatises. That is why the many wise men have neither painted nor carved images of it." I say that, because the sutras lie before their eyes, those who so doubt should examine whether or not it is revealed in the sutras. It is wrong to denounce this object of worship merely because it was never painted or carved in previous ages.

For example, Shakyamuni Buddha once ascended to the Trayastrimsha Heaven³¹ to fulfill his obligations to his [deceased] mother. But no one in the entire world, except for the Venerable Maudgalyayana, was aware of it, because of the Buddha's supernatural powers. Thus even though Buddhism may exist before their eyes, people will not realize it if they lack the proper capacity, nor will it spread unless the time is right. This is in accordance with the natural law, just as the tides of the ocean ebb and flow and the moon in the sky wanes and waxes according to the time.

Lord Shakyamuni treasured this Gohonzon in mind since the remote past of gohyaku-jintengo³², but even after he appeared in this world, he did not expound it for more than forty years following his

²⁶ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 3, p. 61

²⁷ *Daito Saiiki Kai* - Record of the Western Regions." A twelve-volume account by Hsuan-tsang of the T'ang dynasty, recording his travels through Central Asia and India between 629 and 645 in search of Buddhist scriptures.

²⁸ *Jion Den* - "The Life of Hsuan-tsang." A biography of Hsuan-tang, the patriarch of Tz'u-en-ssu (Jap Jion-ji) temple, recording his travels in Central Asia and India, and also dealing with his translation of Buddhist scriptures and the lectures he gave after his return.

²⁹ *Dento - Roku* - "The Transmission of the Lamp." A thirty-volume work written by Tao-yuan in 1004 during the Sung Dynasty, covering the lineage of the Zen sect and the biographies of 1,701 Indian and Chinese Zen masters.

³⁰ *Nihon Shoki* - *Nihon Shoki*: "Chronicles of Japan." A thirty-fascicle history of Japan written in 720 and one of the two oldest extant histories, along with the *Kojiki* (Records of Ancient Matters) written in 712. Both were compiled by imperial order.

³¹ Trayastrimsha Heaven - Also called the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods. The second of the six heavens of the world of desire. It is said to be located on a plateau at the top of Mt. Sumeru, where thirty-three gods live on four peaks, eight gods to a peak, in each of the plateau's four corners. According to the *Kako Genzai Inga Sutra*, Shakyamuni ascended to this heaven after the death of his mother, Maya, where he expounded the *Maya Sutra* for her.

³² *Gohyaku-jintengo* - an incredibly long period of time since Shakyamuni first attained enlightenment.

first preaching. Even in the Lotus Sutra he did not allude to it in the earlier chapters of the theoretical teaching. Only in the Hoto chapter³³ did he begin to suggest it. He revealed it in the Juryo chapter, and concluded his explanation in the Jinriki and Zokurui chapters.³⁴

Bodhisattvas such as Monjushiri living in the Golden World, Miroku in the palace of the Tushita Heaven,³⁵ Kannon on Mount Potalaka³⁶ and Yakuo, who had served the Buddha Nichigatsu Jomyotoku³⁷, all vied with one another in asking [the Buddha's permission to propagate faith in the Gohonzon in the Latter Day of the Law], but the Buddha refused. Those bodhisattvas were well known as men of excellent wisdom and profound learning, but since they had only recently begun to hear the Lotus Sutra, their understanding was still limited. Thus they would not be able to endure great difficulties in the Latter Day.

Then the Buddha declared, "There are my true disciples whom I have hidden at the bottom of the earth since gohyaku-jintengo. I will entrust it to them." So saying, the Buddha summoned those bodhisattvas led by Jogyo³⁸ in the Yujutsu chapter³⁹ and entrusted them with the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo, the heart of the essential teaching of the sutra, [in the Jinriki chapter⁴⁰].

Then the Buddha stated: "You must not propagate it in the first millennium of the Former Day of the Law⁴¹ or in the second millennium of the Middle Day⁴² following my death. In the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law⁴³, slanderous priests will fill the entire world, so that all heavenly gods will be enraged and comets will appear in the sky and the earth will shake like the movement of huge waves. Innumerable disasters and calamities such as drought, fires, floods, gales, epidemics, famine and war will all occur at once. The people throughout the world will don armor and take up bows and staves, and since none of the Buddhas, bodhisattvas or benevolent deities will be able to help them, they will all die and fall like rain into the hell of incessant suffering. At this very time, kings can save their countries and the people will escape calamities if they embrace and believe in this great mandala of the five characters, and in their next life they will not fall into the great fires of hell."

Now I, Nichiren, am not Bodhisattva Jogyo, but perhaps by his design I have already attained a general understanding of this teaching, and I have been expounding it for these more than twenty years.

³³ Hoto Chapter - Hoto chapter: The eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which describes the Treasure Tower of Taho Buddha, who comes to bear witness to the truth of the Lotus Sutra. After Shakyamuni's proclamations in the preceding chapters that the men of Learning and Realization will attain Buddhahood in the future, a magnificent tower emerges from beneath the earth and hangs suspended in midair. This marks the beginning of the Ceremony in the Air, which symbolizes the Buddha's enlightenment.

³⁴ Jinriki and Zokurui chapters - The twenty-first and twenty-second chapters of the Lotus Sutra. In the Jinriki chapter, Shakyamuni Buddha transfers the essence of the sutra specifically to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth led by Jogyo. Then, in the Zokurui chapter, he makes a general transfer of the sutra to all the bodhisattvas. Thereafter all the Buddhas who have gathered from throughout the universe return to their respective lands; the Treasure Tower returns to its original place; and the location of the assembly shifts from midair back to Eagle Peak.

³⁵ Tushita Heaven - "Heaven of Satisfaction." The fourth of the six heavens in the world of desire. It is said that bodhisattvas are reborn there just before their last rebirth in the world when they will attain Buddhahood. his heaven consists of an inner court and an outer court. Bodhisattva Miroku was believed to reside in the inner court of this heaven.

³⁶ Mount Potalaka - A mountain regarded as the home of Bodhisattva Kannon, said to be located on the southern coast of India.

³⁷ Buddha Nichigatsu Jomyotoku - A Buddha who expounded the Lotus Sutra to Bodhisattva Yakuo when the latter was practicing austerities in a past existence as a bodhisattva called Kiken. This Buddha is referred to in the Yakuo (23rd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

³⁸ Jogyo - -- meaning true self, he is one of the four and leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who first appear in chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra.

³⁹ Yujutsu chapter - chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra.

⁴⁰ Jinriki chapter - chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra.

⁴¹ Former Day of the Law - the thousand years that followed Shakyamuni Buddha's death.

⁴² Middle Day of the Law - the second thousand year period following Shakyamuni's death.

⁴³ Latter Day of the Law - the age that we live in now, which began 2000 years after Shakyamuni Buddha's death.

When one resolves to propagate it, he will meet difficulties, as the sutra states: "Since hatred and jealousy [toward this sutra] abound even during the lifetime of the Buddha, how much worse will it be in the world after his passing?" and, "The people will be full of hostility, and it will be extremely difficult to believe." Of the three types of powerful enemies predicted in the sutra, the first indicates the sovereign, district and village stewards and lords of manors as well as the ordinary populace. Believing the charges leveled by the second and third types of enemies, who are priests, they will vilify or slander the votary of the Lotus Sutra, or attack him with swords and staves.

....

Nichiren began to propagate this true teaching in Tojo District in Awa Province in Japan, out of all places in the entire world. Accordingly, the Tojo steward became my enemy, but his clan has now been half destroyed.

O-ama Gozen is insincere and foolish. She was also irresolute, believing at one time, while renouncing her belief at another. When Nichiren incurred the displeasure of the government authorities, she quickly discarded the Lotus Sutra. This is why, even before, I told her the Lotus Sutra is "the most difficult to believe and the most difficult to understand," whenever we met.

If I give her the Gohonzon because I am indebted to her, then the Ten Goddesses will certainly think I am a very partial priest. On the other hand, if I follow the sutra and do not give her a Gohonzon because of her lack of faith, I will not be partial, but she may well harbor a grudge against me because she does not realize her fault. I have explained the reasons for my refusal in detail in a letter to Suke no Ajari. Please send for the letter and show it to her.

You are of the same family as O-ama Gozen, but you have demonstrated the sincerity of your faith. Because you have often sent offerings to me, both to Sado and here to Minobu, and because your resolve does not seem to wane, I have inscribed a Gohonzon for you. But I still worry whether you will maintain your faith to the end and feel as if I were treading on thin ice or facing a drawn sword. I will write to you again in more detail.

When I incurred the displeasure of the government, even in Kamakura 999 out of 1,000 discarded their faith, but since popular feeling toward me has now softened, some of them seem to regret. I do not class O-ama Gozen with those people and I feel deeply sorry for her, but I can no more bestow the Gohonzon upon someone who goes against the Lotus Sutra than flesh can replace bone. Please explain to her thoroughly why I cannot grant her request.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The sixteenth day of the second month
Feb 16, 1275 Nii-ama Gozen

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