

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SPRING

2009

## ON CHANTING

Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, New Jersey

June 2007

**QUESTION:** Is meditation or silent sitting (focusing on the breath) a part of the practice of Nichiren Buddhism?<sup>1</sup> Some Nichiren Buddhists do *shodaigyo*<sup>2</sup> meditation before and after chanting *ODaimoku*<sup>3</sup> in order to calm and center oneself before chanting, and to deepen one's faith and abide in the effects of chanting afterwards. What does the Shoshin-kai<sup>4</sup> think of this?

**Reverend Raido Hirota (RH):** Why do we do gongyo and daimoku? We do gongyo to open, to show, to realize and to enter (*kai ji go nyo*) Buddhahood. Shakyamuni<sup>5</sup> explains *kai ji go nyo* in the Hoben (2<sup>nd</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The purpose of gongyo is to awaken to the understanding that you have the life of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo<sup>6</sup> within you and, to gain the insight that doing the practice of gongyo and daimoku is deeply important and more valuable than meditating to calm yourself. Do not do gongyo with the attitude that this is your duty or your job. And don't do it fast. Do gongyo politely, as though you are giving yourself a lesson.

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**The Middle Way** is published by  
Udumbara Foundation

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All positions are voluntary

<sup>1</sup> Nichiren Buddhism – any Japanese Buddhism originating from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>2</sup> Shodaigyo – the meditation practice of Nichiren Shu

<sup>3</sup> ODaimoku – also Daimoku – chanting Namu-myoho-rence-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>4</sup> Shoshin-kai – the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.

<sup>5</sup> Shakyamuni – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 B.C.E.-949 B.C.E.), the historical founder of Buddhism.

<sup>6</sup> Namu-myoho-rence-kyo – the Mystic Law; the ultimate Law of life and the universe; the Buddha nature in all things.

Not only should you feel good after doing gongyo and daimoku, you should feel joy while you are doing gongyo. What are you concentrating on when you meditate? There is no meaning if you do not concentrate on the life of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo. You don't need to meditate to prepare yourself to do gongyo and daimoku.

When I was a university student I lived in a temple that was located in Ikebukuro, a community situated at the center of Tokyo. It's a crowded area, with many trains passing through. The area is very densely populated, and the temple was full of believers chanting from 6am to 10pm everyday. At any given time, on any given day there was always someone chanting. When I would watch the believers chant, I was surprised that there was no attempt to chant together or to coordinate the rhythm. Each person chanted in his or her own way. One person chanted slowly, another more vigorously. Once I even saw an argument ensue between two people who disagreed with each other's way of chanting. I thought the whole thing was very odd.

We really need to think about why we are chanting, and how to chant. Please don't only consider yourself. You need to go beyond yourself. In this practice you must consider others too.

When we chant daimoku and verbally pronounce the phrase Namu-myoho-rence-kyo, our ears hear the sound and our minds respond to the sound. In this way, each one of us individually experiences the Buddha's teaching. When we chant together, we are not only listening to the Buddha's teaching from our own voices, we are listening to it, and hearing it from the voices of others. Observe yourself when you chant with others to see whether you are also listening to their voices and recognizing it as the preaching of the Buddha. If you are chanting together you must realize that this is a teaching of Buddha coming forth from your voice and from the voices of your friends, family members or others as well. It is important that you have such an understanding and a recognition that when you chant you are listening to the voice of Buddha coming from everyone.

From Daishonin's perspective, there is no need to meditate before or after chanting daimoku. Because we are ordinary human beings, all kinds of thoughts arise in our minds when we chant. However, the essential purpose of our chanting is the enlightenment of all human beings. This is the goal of our practice. Please keep this in mind.

## Risshu-e

April 28, 1253

...I first proclaimed the true teaching at Seicho-jo temple. It was noon on the twenty-eight day of the fourth month in the fifth year of Kencho (1253), on the southern side of Jibutsu-do Hall in the Shobutsu-bo of the temple, located in

Tojo Village.

*Nichiren*



This is the birthday of  
Namu-myoho-rence-kyo



# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS CONCERNING GOHONZON AND THE THREE GREAT SECRET LAWS

Reverend Raido Hirota

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June 2007

**QUESTION:** You have explained the importance of mandala consecration. So does that mean that people in SGI<sup>7</sup> who chant to the non-consecrated Gohonzon<sup>8</sup> will not receive benefit? Or do these people still receive benefits because they can be likened to people who have not yet received Gohonzon? That is, is it correct to say that chanting to non-consecrated Gohonzons is as good as chanting without Gohonzon?

**RH:** What you've said is the same as saying, even if you are doing something wrong, it is alright because you receive benefits. This logic is very wrong. In fact, it's crazy.

Josei Toda, the 2<sup>nd</sup> president of the Soka Gakkai once said "Gohonzon is a happiness machine." This statement blatantly expresses the Gakkai's purpose of its practice, which is to receive worldly benefits. The Gakkai thinks it is good enough if their object of worship looks like a Gohonzon. They never teach how Daishonin<sup>9</sup> lived his life; what he taught; what his essential thoughts were when he inscribed Gohonzon.

Consecration is the culmination of teacher and believer together discussing and confirming Daishonin's teaching, way of life, and his heart. That is why consecration is very important. You must have a consecration ceremony. For example, let's say Gohonzon is equivalent to money. Counterfeit money is bad, even if it looks like real money. It's bad because there is no government guarantee behind it, and it deceives both people and society, and causes a fluctuation in the economy. But even real money is not good if it is stolen or gotten by cheating or through deceitful means. You receive money as a reward for doing good work; you are paid a price for doing the right thing. This money has value and its purpose is to be used for a good cause. That's why you need money. The purpose of a Gohonzon which has been consecrated is to achieve Daishonin's basic teaching, which is Buddhahood (*jobutsu*). We must try our very best to practice and develop strong faith. When we do, Gohonzon will light up like a mirror and reflect the Buddha's life in our life.

It doesn't matter how much you chant, if you chant for your desires, for the expansion of an organization, or to gain power, it is the work of the devil. It is not going to light up your life. Of course, [the Gakkai Gohonzon] is a fake Gohonzon. But even with a real Gohonzon, if you chant this way, Gohonzon will not light up like a mirror and show you that you have Buddha's life within you.

**Believer 1 (B1):** Nikken, the 67<sup>th</sup> high priest, said that consecration of Gohonzon has to be performed by the high priest and only the high priest. What do you think of this?

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<sup>7</sup> SGI – Soka Gakkai International (Gakkai) – a secular organization that misuses the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in its own philosophy and practice.

<sup>8</sup> Gohonzon – the scroll that is the mandala or object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and represents the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

<sup>9</sup> Daishonin – 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 realize enlightenment.

**RH:** It is not only the high priest who can consecrate Gohonzon. Gohonzon can be consecrated by any ordained Nichiren Shoshu priest. For instance, if your Gohonzon is damaged or stained, a trained professional will clean and repair Gohonzon. It is not necessary for a high priest or a priest to do this work. But once the Gohonzon has been repaired and returned to the priest, the priest will perform a consecration ceremony for the Gohonzon. This is also the case with juzu beads. When the priest receives the juzu from the factory where they were made, he performs a consecration ceremony for them. The same is true for tombstones. But for a tombstone the priest and believers together consecrate it. So in this instance consecration is not only the role of the priest, it is also your responsibility.

**B2:** You said that someone other than the priest could clean Gohonzon? And are these believers who do this?

**RH:** Professionals are trained to make and clean Gohonzon. Sometimes they are practitioners, and sometimes not. Even if someone practices this Buddhism, if their skills are not so good, we wouldn't want to use them.

**B3:** How are the individual Gohonzons made, and how are the reproductions done? What is the actual process of making a Gohonzon before they are disseminated?

**RH:** Historically, local temples produced Gohonzons. The people involved in the production of Gohonzon were believers. Once a quantity of Gohonzons were made they were sent to the head temple. You may have thought that the head temple made the Gohonzon, or that they were produced in close proximity to the head temple, but that is not so. In later years, because Tokyo is a bigger city and has more resources than Fujinomiya<sup>10</sup> and the area surrounding Taisekiji<sup>11</sup>, Gohonzons came to be manufactured in Tokyo, and then dispatched to the head temple. Printing and producing new Gohonzons require professional expertise. It is a highly skilled and valued job to produce this invaluable and treasured object. But if we emphasize this, and tell the manufacturer to make production of Gohonzon a priority, we risk the possibility of having Gohonzons exploited, stolen or misused. We want to avoid that at all cost. This is one reason it would be better to have Gohonzons produced entirely by believers if at all possible. But the believers have to be highly skilled.

**B2:** What is the process now? There's the head temple, the Shoshin-kai and the Soka Gakkai. The Soka Gakkai has its own Gohonzons.

**RH:** Shoshin-kai never produces or reproduces Gohonzons. We have Gohonzons in storage. We distribute Nittatsu Shonin<sup>12</sup> Gohonzons. In the case of Taisekiji, since Nikken<sup>13</sup> has stepped down, Nichinyo<sup>14</sup> has become high priest and has started making his own Gohonzon. As for the Soka Gakkai, there are some priests (so called reformed priests) supporting Soka Gakkai. They are the ones providing Gohonzon to SGI.

**B4:** I received Gohonzon in 1980. I started with the Soka Gakkai. Because things have changed so much since then, would I have to receive gojukai again?

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<sup>10</sup> Fujinomiya – the city at the base of Mt. Fuji where Taisekiji is located.

<sup>11</sup> Taisekiji – the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu.

<sup>12</sup> Nittatsu Shonin – (d. 1979) 66<sup>th</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu

<sup>13</sup> Nikken – 67<sup>th</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu

<sup>14</sup> Nichinyo – 68<sup>th</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu

**RH:** Before the Soka Gakkai started making trouble, the believers were considered good believers. Therefore we don't necessarily ask them to receive gojukai again. It's okay.

In 1979 and 1980, the priests had the option of bestowing either a Nittatsu Shonin or Nikken Gohonzon. So, it depends on the priest and the temple. That was a transition period. At that time I was still at Head Temple Taisekiji, but I had the responsibility of bestowing Gohonzon. Because I strongly felt Nikken's qualifications for ascending to the position of high priest were suspect, I was not comfortable giving out Nikken Gohonzons. So after Nittatsu Shonin's death in 1979 I continued to confer Nittatsu Shonin Gohonzons.

**B5:** You said this is a Nitto Shonin<sup>15</sup> Gohonzon. Why did you decide to use this Gohonzon?

**RH:** Before the Soka Gakkai was established and became affiliated with Nichiren Shoshu, all Gohonzons were made in local temples, as I mentioned earlier. Priests and their acolytes made a template or plate and produced a quantity of prints that they then made into scrolls and bestowed on believers. When I became a Shoshin-kai priest, one of the senior priests in the Shoshin-kai evaluated my situation and decided that I needed this big Gohonzon to conduct ceremonies. He also gave me half of his supply of Gohonzons. So this is how I came to use this particular Gohonzon. I use this Gohonzon for all occasions away from the temple. This is the Gohonzon I take with me.

**B1:** Was Nikken's claim correct that only the high priest consecrates Gohonzon?

**RH:** No, it is not. In former days, before factories and shipping became a part of the process, local temples took care of everything in the production of Gohonzons: printing and consecration. Not only does the high priest make false claims about his duties and responsibilities, he is also functioning like a living Buddha.

**QUESTION:** For people who have just started chanting and yet have to wait for some time to receive Gohonzon, do they also receive benefits just by chanting without the Gohonzon?

**RH:** Yes, They can be enlightened.

**B1:** How does one qualify to receive Gohonzon? How long does one have to wait?

**RH:** I will perform Gojukai<sup>16</sup> for anyone who has a desire to practice Nichiren Daishonin's true Buddhism with the Shoshin-kai. However, at the time of gojukai I will not confer Gohonzon. Later, after I have confirmed that a person has learned the basics of the practice and continues to cherish a desire to practice and develop faith, I will provide Gohonzon. For the United States, because I come here only once a year, a person who wants to receive Gohonzon needs to wait at least one year after I have met him or her. But in the case of Japan, it depends on the person. An individual will come to the temple. We will practice together. I will teach him or her Gongyo and the basics of Buddhism. I will visit one's home to see the conditions in which one practices, making sure there are no relics, or shrines from another religion in the home, and that in time a proper altar is set up. If all the conditions are right, an individual may receive Gohonzon in three months, six months or a year. It depends.

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<sup>15</sup> Nitto Shonin - 29<sup>th</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu.

<sup>16</sup> Gojukai – the consecration and conversion ceremony for accepting faith in Nichiren Daishonin's true Buddhism.

**B6:** I introduced someone to this practice about ten years ago. He chants all the time, and is grateful, but he doesn't want to receive Gohonzon, and doesn't want to be actively involved. He is perfectly satisfied with his practice. I'm wondering if there is something lacking there?

**RH:** I don't know what the person's thinking is. I have said that one can become enlightened without Gohonzon. If a person is chanting everyday with the desire to continue this practice and become enlightened, but he is in a situation where he cannot have Gohonzon, then that is okay. But if a person thinks that it is so much easier not to have Gohonzon because he doesn't want to take care of the Gohonzon and the altar, then there might be something there to consider.

**B6:** I think it is also a question of losing control. He talks about bringing out his Buddha nature through the practice, and that someone else can reveal his or her own Buddha nature. I've explained to him that it's the same Buddha nature. It's not my Buddha nature and your Buddha nature. I think my friend is afraid of giving up something.

**RH:** People might have different ideas about organized religion. Some people like organized religion, some people don't. For instance, many of you may have had a negative experience practicing in the Soka Gakkai. Based on your experience you may think that all religious organizations are bad. All organizations have good people and bad people. Whether your experience was a good experience or a bad experience, you need to learn from it and grow from it. You must have a desire to learn from the Daishonin. You must seek the essence of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and deepen your faith. The correct way to think about Gohonzon is to realize that Gohonzon is within you. You are living with Gohonzon. If you don't have, or if you lose this awareness, then you will believe that all religious organizations are bad, that you don't need a Gohonzon, and that you can practice alone in your own way. Thinking this way, you become very selfish, and your heart will deviate from Daishonin's belief and vision. Even though you may think you are practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, you are actually practicing your own Buddhism, which has nothing to do with the Daishonin's spirit or teachings. It can be dangerous.

**B7:** My mother is in her 90s and has Gohonzon. What should I do with it when she dies? My daughter is practicing, but she doesn't read gongyo yet. If my daughter becomes ready for Gohonzon, can the Gohonzon be passed on from grandmother to granddaughter?

**RH:** The point I'd like to emphasize with regard to receiving Gohonzon is that we are receiving Nichiren Daishonin's Gohonzon. I want to make this point very clear. When an individual receives Gohonzon, he must receive it from the priest—from the temple. If a person inherits Gohonzon from his parents or grandparents, he may think this is his parents' or grandparents' Gohonzon, instead of thinking this is Nichiren Daishonin's life; Nichiren Daishonin's Gohonzon. This distinction I want to make very clear. Therefore I would like to encourage you to return your mother's Gohonzon to the temple rather than passing it on to your daughter.

Some people may think this is my Gohonzon and I'll do what I want with it. That is wrong thinking. For instance, you live on this earth and breathe the air every single moment. So you might think the air is yours. But the air is not yours. This is even true for divers who pay for oxygen tanks to use while deep sea diving. They may think that because they paid for it, the oxygen is theirs. But that's not so. Once the oxygen leaves the tank, it belongs to everyone. It is the same with Gohonzon. We do not own it. We are borrowing it. It is on loan to us.

When a couple who has been practicing Buddhism for a number of years decides to separate and divorce, they both feel a strong attachment to the same Gohonzon. This has incited many serious arguments over who owns the Gohonzon. Gohonzon is not owned by any specific person.

I would say that even if your daughter develops a desire to practice this Buddhism, and inherits her grandmother's Gohonzon, I would like a clear distinction made as to whose Gohonzon it is, and why your daughter is practicing. It must be understood that your daughter is practicing to Nichiren Daishonin's Gohonzon and not to her grandmother's Gohonzon. This is not the course of action I recommend, but I want to make this point clear.

**RH:** Following Tatsunokuchi<sup>17</sup>, the Kamakura government held meetings for a month to consider why they were unable to kill Nichiren. During that month Nichiren Daishonin was kept in a lodging guarded by a samurai. It was during that time that the Daishonin inscribed the first Gohonzon. That Gohonzon was very simple. It had Namu-myoho-rence-kyo written down the middle, and in its four corners, the Four Heavenly Kings who protect the Buddha land. Also on either side of the daimoku written in Siddham (an ancient Sanskrit) was *Aizen* (representing desires are enlightenment) on the left and *Fudo* (representing birth and death are nirvana) on the right. This is the Gohonzon to which Daishonin first worshipped.

**B5:** Is this when Daishonin stopped worshipping Shakyamuni?

**RH:** Yes, at this point Daishonin stopped worshipping Shakyamuni, but he kept the statue of Shakyamuni with him at all times. However, before Daishonin inscribed this first Gohonzon, he would place the statue of Shakyamuni on the altar then place the Lotus Sutra in front of the statue. That is how he worshipped.

The first Gohonzon is in the possession of Nichiren Shu<sup>18</sup> and kept at their head temple at Mt. Minobu. They claim that that Gohonzon is the most valuable Gohonzon.

Daishonin alone had an extremely difficult time on Sado Island<sup>19</sup>. His disciples did not experience the hardships that he had to endure. After Sado, Daishonin settled at Minobu. During this period Nikko Shonin<sup>20</sup> shakubukued farmers in the Atsuhara community. These new practitioners were determined to become devout believers of the Lotus Sutra after hearing the hardship the Daishonin had encountered, because they too were experiencing difficulties. The Kamakura government was alerted to this group of followers and demanded that they cease their practice. When the farmers refused, the government detained them and subsequently executed three of them. From Daishonin's perspective, these believers who had suffered this great trial differed from him in their level of education, their standing in society, their practice, their circumstances and their environment, yet they manifested the same faith as his. That is why Daishonin inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon for all mankind at that time.

**B5:** How many Gohonzons were inscribed between the Tatsunokuchi persecution and the Atsuhara persecution?

**RH:** On Sado Island Daishonin inscribed several Gohonzons that were more developed than the original Gohonzon. Those Gohonzons were closer to what we have today. At that time there were no

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<sup>17</sup> Tatsunokuchi – an execution ground in Kamakura where Nichiren Daishonin was taken to be beheaded on September 12, 1271.

<sup>18</sup> Nichiren Shu – a sect of Nichiren Buddhism that worships Shakyamuni as the true Buddha.

<sup>19</sup> Sado Island – a remote island in the Japan Sea where Nichiren Daishonin was exiled after Tatsunokuchi.

<sup>20</sup> Nikko Shonin – (1246-1333) – 2<sup>nd</sup> high priest, Nichiren Daishonin's appointed successor.

believers who had the same heart as the Daishonin. It was not until he was settled at Minobu, and the Atsuhara persecution evinced the faith of believers equal to his own faith that it became possible for Daishonin to inscribe Gohonzons that reflected his full enlightenment.

Daishonin inscribed more Gohonzons while at Minobu. Today there are only 127 extant Nichiren inscribed Gohonzons. Though he inscribed more, believers and priests had Gohonzons cremated with their remains after their death. These believers, as it turns out, were in the end followers of Shakyamuni and not the Daishonin.

**B6:** Daishonin conferred Gohonzons to people who still believed in Shakyamuni's teachings?

**RH:** At Minobu Nichiren Shu has Gohonzons enshrined with a statue of Shakyamuni in front of them. They worship Shakyamuni. When the believers die, the Gohonzon is cremated with them. That is why there are only 127 Nichiren Daishonin inscribed Gohonzons remaining. Most of these are in Nichiren Shu—the Minobu sect.

**B6:** Why does the Minobu sect have most of these Gohonzons?

**RH:** Like the Gakkai, the Minobu priests made a strong effort to shakubuku. When Daishonin died, almost all of the Gohonzons he had inscribed were affiliated with the Minobu priests.

**B6:** When we speak of the Three Great Secret Laws<sup>21</sup>—*honmon no honzon*, *honmon no Daimoku* and *honmon no kaidan*—what is the *honmon no kaidan*? You mentioned the high sanctuary above, is it something that was accomplished with Nichiren Daishonin? Was it something accomplished after Nichiren Daishonin? Or is it something to be accomplished in the future? Before their split, Taiseikiji and Soka Gakkai said that it was the Shohondo at Taiseikiji. But Nichiren Daishonin said in his transmission letter to Nikko Shonin, that that *kaidan* would come about when the leader of the land took faith in the true Law. What is the *honmon no kaidan*?

**RH:** *Kaidan* (sanctuary) is the place where you vow to keep this religion and to practice. It is not only where the Gohonzon is enshrined. We do not call a place a *kaidan* because a Gohonzon is enshrined there. A *kaidan* is anywhere where someone keeps the vow of faith and practices the true teaching. Moreover, there is no *honzon*, no *daimoku*, and no *kaidan* that has a higher value. All *honzens*, all *daimoku* and all *kaidans* are on the same level and are of equal value. Daishonin said, when I chant *daimoku* and you chant *daimoku* it is the same, it is of equal value.

**B6:** So when Daishonin says *honmon no honzon*, *honmon no daimoku* and *honmon no kaidan*, he's not talking about one single Gohonzon in one single place and the *daimoku* that is being chanted in that one single place. He's saying that every single place, every single Gohonzon and every single person who chants with the true faith, together that makes the Three Great Secret Laws.

**RH:** Yes. It's good to learn about the history of this Buddhism and how the Gohonzon came to be inscribed. You must know the history of how and why Gohonzons were inscribed.

**B6:** Taiseikiji believers ask me why Shoshin-kai priests and followers don't believe in the Three Great Secret Laws. They view *honmon no honzon*, *honmon no kaidan* and *honmon no daimoku* as the

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<sup>21</sup> Three Great Secret Laws – the object of worship of true Buddhism, the invocation of true Buddhism and the high sanctuary of true Buddhism.

Dai-Gohonzon<sup>22</sup>, the place where the Dai-Gohonzon is enshrined, and the *daimoku* that is done in that place, collectively as the Three Great Secret Laws.

**RH:** The Three Great Secret Laws are in the heart. Taisekiji has the Dai-Gohonzon enshrined but there is no heart in that sanctuary. Nikko Shonin left Minobu because Minobu was destroying Daishonin's heart. Nikko Shonin settled near Mt. Fuji and established Taisekiji to preserve the heart of Nichiren Daishonin's true teaching. Now Nikko Shonin's heart and Daishonin's heart are no longer at Taisekiji. Daishonin said, if the body is bent the shadow will follow. The bodies of both Taisekiji and Soka Gakkai are bent. Thus their shadows are distorted.

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## DISCUSSION ON THE TRUE BENEFITS OF PRACTICE

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June 2007

**QUESTION:** There are three proofs taught by Daishonin. The most important is actual proof. I fully agree with this standard of validating whether a practice is correct or not. I have read articles on actual proofs/benefits as claimed by Nichiren Shoshu and SGI practitioners. I am not sure about the proofs of Nichiren Shu or independent Buddhist groups, but have there been any reported benefits from your members affiliated with Shoshin-kai? If so, would you care to share?

**RH:** The three proofs are written or documentary proof, reason or theoretical proof and actual proof. In the gosho "The Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain" Daishonin says, "In judging the relative merit of Buddhist doctrines, I Nichiren, believe that the best standards are those of reason, and documentary proof. And even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact." The Gakkai's assertion upon reading this passage is that actual proof is the most important.

Written proof means the Lotus Sutra, interpretations, records, etc. That is to say, written proof is the Lotus Sutra, interpretations of the Lotus Sutra by T'ien-t'ai<sup>23</sup> and Dengyo,<sup>24</sup> as well as their historical works, and most importantly Daishonin's gosho, which must be placed at the center.

Theoretical proof examines whether written proof makes sense, whether it has universality, and whether it conforms to society.

The Gakkai defines actual proof as being cured of sickness, becoming rich, and solving all your problems. But Nichiren Daishonin explains that actual proof means there is no sutra other than the Lotus Sutra that teaches that everyone can become enlightened. Enlightenment is the manifestation of actual proof.

You cannot say which is most important: written proof, theoretical proof or actual proof. They are all equally important. Of these three, one cannot be lacking. The Lotus Sutra is both written

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<sup>22</sup> Dai-Gohonzon – the large plank Gohonzon enshrined at Taisekiji.

<sup>23</sup> T'ien-T'ai – (538-597) the founder of the Chinese school of Buddhism.

<sup>24</sup> Dengyo – (767-822) – founder of the Tendai sect of Buddhism in Japan.

proof and theoretical proof. Daishonin, however, teaches that even if you have good written and theoretical proof in the sutra, if it is Shakyamuni's sutra of *hongamyo* (True Effect), then it is not good enough. It must be the sutra which puts *honninmyo* (True Cause) in the center. That is how you become enlightened.

“And even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact.” This shows the importance of actual proof and how valuable it is. Actual proof is important because it is enlightenment. That means, it doesn't matter how valuable this sutra is, if you cannot become enlightened, there's no use in practicing it.

The teaching of the sutra transitioned from the theoretical teaching of Shakyamuni to the teaching hidden in the depths of the Lotus Sutra taught by Daishonin. Shakyamuni's advent transitioned to the Former Day of the Law (*Shoho*);<sup>25</sup> the Former Day of the Law transitioned to the Middle Day of the Law (*Zoho*);<sup>26</sup> and the Middle Day of the Law transitioned to the Latter Day of the Law (*Mappo*).<sup>27</sup>

You cannot call the way Daisaku Ikeda<sup>28</sup> thinks and the way the high priest of Taiseikiji thinks, actual proof equaling enlightenment. The way they think is slander.

**B6:** The Gakkai thinks that actual proof means benefits – good health, good relationships, good jobs. They always say that those are the superior benefits. What are our benefits in the Shoshin-kai?

**RH:** First of all, benefits do not mean some kind personal or material gain. It's not about relative gain, such as someone loses something and I gain it. It is not comparative between you and someone else. Essentially, benefits in this practice are universal: I gain; so do you. I gain Buddhahood; so do you. It is not competitive or comparative. We both gain. It is not me striving to be better than you. In a letter to Shijo Kingo,<sup>29</sup> Nichiren wrote, “This life is like a dream. One cannot know if he will live until tomorrow. Even if you should become the most wretched of beggars, never disgrace the Lotus Sutra.” Some people in the Soka Gakkai may say that becoming homeless is disgracing the Lotus Sutra or Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. That is just not so. This Buddhism is deeper than that.

In the gosho, “Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man”<sup>30</sup> Daishonin explains that *kosen-rufu*<sup>31</sup> is about developing faith, cherishing faith and carry out faith; and it is about how each individual deepens his understanding of faith in order to realize the blessing of Buddhahood. Daishonin further stated in this gosho, “How foolish you are! Your attachment to this belief that one should abandon the few in favor of the many towers higher than Mount Sumeru... Do not be blindly attached to the question of many or few.” Therefore it is not about the number of people practicing, as SGI asserts. Increasing the number of people, or being concerned about the number people in the organization is not the point of this practice.

**B1:** How do you know SGI has the view you say it has?

**RH:** I had a chance to talk to a Soka Gakkai member at my temple in Hiroshima Province. We talked about the community activities and social events which SGI supported or conducted. These were festivals related to the activities of other religions. As you know, in the U.S. there are many

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<sup>25</sup> The Former Day of the Law (*shoho*) – From Shakyamuni's death in 949 BCE – 51 CE.

<sup>26</sup> The Middle Day of the Law (*zoho*) – 51 – 1052.

<sup>27</sup> The Latter Day of the Law (*mappo*) – began in 1052

<sup>28</sup> Daisaku Ikeda – president of Soka Gakkai International.

<sup>29</sup> “Warning Against Begrudging One's Fief,” *Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. Four, pp. 283.

<sup>30</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. Five, pp. 111-119.

<sup>31</sup> *Kosen-rufu* – widely spreading true Buddhism.

events that have religious affiliation. I asked the Gakkai member what he thought about supporting activities related to other religions. He told me that he felt it was important to support community activities for the sake of kosen-rufu.” If by engaging in these activities I receive punishment, he said, I don’t think Daishonin’s Buddhism is right.” In my reply I emphasized the importance of knowing the strictness of Daishonin’s Law. It is important to emphasize the strictness of the teaching.

There are many religious organizations, including SGI, that teach their followers that because they practice, worship and follow a certain belief, they will be protected. For instance, they teach that you can cure your sickness, gain financial benefit, and so forth. At the same time, they also teach that if you don’t practice or become a follower of their religion, you will suffer hardship and loss. On the contrary, I believe religion has to teach how to deal with the big changes in our life: birth, aging, sickness and death. These four sufferings are the big challenges. Rather than deny this reality, we should emphasize the power of the teaching that teaches us how we can still live the most rewarding life within the parameters of the four sufferings.

Many practitioners come to my temple to participate in activities. Some believers have been practicing for over twenty years, and were taught by the Soka Gakkai that the benefits of practice were good health, financial stability, good relationships, and other material gains. But when these people experience hardship or come face to face with other challenging situations, they come to me. The questions they ask me are: How to overcome the situation? How to regain good health? How to gain financial stability? Etc. I always teach them that Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is not about material gain; it is about gaining Buddhahood. But for those people who were taught from the beginning of their practice that the rewards of practice were material benefits, it is very difficult for them to understand the true purpose and true benefit of practice. It is very difficult for them to understand what the practice is all about.

**B1:** Gaining enlightenment through practicing Buddhism, particularly in very difficult conditions, what does that mean in our everyday life?

**RH:** As I mentioned earlier, I had a conversation with a Soka Gakkai member not too long ago. During the conversation I reminded him of Daishonin’s statement “more valuable than the treasure of the storehouse is the treasure of the body, and the most valuable of all is the treasure of the heart. From this day forward please accumulate the treasure of the heart.” Then I asked him what he thought was the treasure of the heart. He said the treasure of the heart was the life of Buddha. I complimented him on his good understanding of this point. However, he also went on to say that the treasure of the storehouse and the treasure of the body were also important. I don’t know what his understanding truly was. However I feel there are too many people who put the greater emphasis on the treasure of the body and the treasure of the storehouse. The treasure of the heart should be the central and most essential treasure. If you lose sight of this point, you will lose the essential understanding of Nichiren Daishonin’s teaching. I cannot emphasize enough how careful one must be about this.

There are two aspects of the “The Three Treasures” goshō to consider. In one sense, the goshō is comparing the treasures. That is, comparing each of their value relative to the others: the body is more valuable than the storehouse and the heart is more valuable than either the storehouse or the body. It’s a matter of relativity. But at the same time, when it comes to the treasure of the heart it is a matter of absoluteness. There is no longer a comparison being made between the treasures. The treasure of the heart is an absolute treasure. It is not relative to anything. What matters is whether you gain the true understanding of the treasure of the heart. The key is to gain the true understanding. If we understand the essential nature of the treasure of the heart, we can acknowledge the wonderful treasure we possess within us, and that our friends, family members and all others possess the same treasure. This is the basis of equality among all of us. If one judges another by appearance, health condition,

how much one owns, one may either highly regard someone or disrespect someone. Such an attitude is completely contrary to the Buddhist perspective. Everyone is equal. You must look at everyone as being equal.

Nichiren Daishonin said in "Letter to Myomitsu Shonin,"<sup>32</sup> "I am not the founder of any sect, nor am I a latter-day follower of any older sect. I am a priest without precepts,, neither keeping the precepts nor breaking them. I am an ordinary creature like an ox or a sheep, divorced from both the possession of wisdom and the absence of it....Moreover, I chant the Daimoku, which is the heart and core of the entire sutra, and I urge others to do likewise. [When one does so,] he will be like mugwort growing in a field of hemp or wood marked with a carpenter's inking line. Though the mugwort and the wood may not be straight to begin with, they will as a matter of course become so.

"In the same way, one who chants the Daimoku as the Lotus Sutra teaches will never have a twisted mind."

The Gakkai is not practicing this Buddhism. The practice of this Buddhism is not for material gain. The purpose of this practice is to tell everyone that everything has the life of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

**B1:** In the United States there are many religious affiliated events and schools that we have to deal with. How do we deal with them?

**RH:** Actually I would like to hear from you what you think is the best way to approach this. I'd like to know what your challenge is. Because you were born in this society where the majority of people celebrate Christmas, and many people attend religious schools, it is natural that you interact with these people and encounter school or community, business or social events which are associated with religious belief. In some way you may need to participate in these events. What do you do? What are your thoughts on this?

**B2:** In schools they recite the Pledge of Allegiance every morning to the flag. The phrase "under god" is a part of the recitation. Everyday, every morning my children start their day saying this. That makes me very uncomfortable.

**B8:** My teacher said if we don't say it we will be punished.

**B6:** God is on our money: "In God We Trust." In the song sang often in schools and other events, "America the Beautiful," are the words "God shed his light on thee." God is everywhere in our society.

**RH:** What is this god?

**B9:** It depends on who you ask. This is the bigger problem in the country right now (2007). The United States was founded on the separation of church and state. As time goes by in our history, depending on what political party is in power, there are some more Christian views in place and some less. Right now (2007) we are in the period of the Christian Right. In order to get elected, conservative people must get the votes of very fundamentalist Christian people. So it is influencing our political process. That's a huge problem.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. Five, pp. 198-200.

**RH:** I really feel your challenge. Having visited the United States on a regular basis for many years, I've come to realize that this is really a country based on God. When people are surprised, they exclaim, "Oh my God!" I would prefer to hear, "Oh my Gohonzon!" I hope this happens at some point.

In Japan, it is also getting worse and worse. On the whole, Japan is losing the sense of the importance of religion in society. Nowadays, more and more Japanese are celebrating Christmas. They are spending more time and money on the celebration of Christmas than they are on the traditional New Years celebration. What I did was I kept my children home from school on those days that Christmas events took place at school.

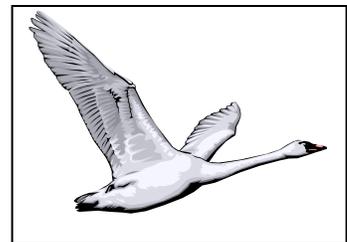
Concerning your development and continuation of faith, when you get to the point that you feel this emphasis on god is something you need to challenge even though your beliefs and ideas are different from those of your friends and family and society at large, I want to encourage you to pursue your belief. You may ask yourself, why do I need to do this? Sometimes your friends or family members may oppose you. You might be hated by them and you may even be ostracized, but you still need to challenge the situation by speaking out.

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## GOSHO SELECTION

*Excerpt*  
**"King Rinda"**<sup>33</sup>



**Once** in the past there lived a great ruler named King Rinda, a wise monarch who ruled over the entire land of Jambudvipa. Now what was it that this king lived on? He listened to the sound of white horses neighing, and thus nourished the growth of his body, provided rest and tranquility for his body and mind, and ruled over his kingdom. This occurred in the same way that the creatures called frogs listen to the cries of their mothers and are thus enabled to grow; that the autumn bush clover blooms when it hears the crying of the deer; that the ivory plant puts forth buds when it hears the sound of thunder; or that the pomegranate flourishes when it encounters a stone.

This being the case, King Rinda had gathered together a number of white horses and was taking care of them. And because these white horses would neigh only when they caught sight of white swans, he also gathered together a number of white swans that he kept in his care. As a result, not only did the king himself enjoy peace and tranquility, but the hundreds of officials and the thousands of attendants who served him also prospered. Throughout the realm, the wind and rain came in their proper season, and other countries bowed their heads in submission. This situation continued for a number of years.

But, perhaps because of an error in his rule, or perhaps because the rewards accruing from his karma were exhausted, the thousands and ten thousands of white swans suddenly disappeared, and the countless numbers of white horses ceased their neighing. And because the king could no longer hear

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<sup>33</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 7, pp. 179-182, 188.

the neighing of the white horses, he was like a flower that wilts or the moon when it is eclipsed. His skin changed color, his strength waned away, his six sense organs grew dull and clouded, and he became like a senile old man. His queen, too, became old and feeble. The hundreds of officials and the thousands of attendants lamented, not knowing what to do. The skies clouded over, the earth trembled, great winds and droughts appeared, and famines and pestilence occurred, until so many persons had died that their flesh piled up in mounds and their bones were like heaps of tiles. Moreover, the country was beset by attacks from other nations.

At this time the king, lamenting over what to do, concluded that the only recourse was to pray to the Buddhas and gods. From times past there had been non-Buddhist believers in the kingdom, and they were numerous in many regions of the land. There were also many persons who honored the Law of the Buddha and regarded it as a treasure of the state. The king, declaring that he would honor the teachings of whichever group was successful at attracting the white swans and causing the white horses to neigh, first commanded the non-Buddhist believers to try the effectiveness of their teachings. But though they carried out their efforts over several days, not a single white swan appeared, and the white horses failed to neigh.

Then the king ordered the non-Buddhists to cease their prayers and the Buddhists to make the attempt with theirs. At that time there was a young monk known as Bodhisattva Ashvaghosha or Horse Neigh. When he was summoned before the king, he said, "If Your Majesty will abolish the erroneous doctrines of the non-Buddhists throughout the kingdom and work to spread the Law of the Buddha, it will be easy enough to make the horses neigh!"

The king issued an edict that this should be done. Then Bodhisattva Ashvaghosha addressed prayers to the Buddhas of the three existences and the ten directions, whereupon a white swan immediately appeared. When the white horses caught sight of the white swan, they whinnied in a single voice. No sooner had the king heard the single neigh of the horses than he opened his eyes. As two white swans, and then hundreds and thousands of them appeared, the hundreds and thousands of white horses were instantly filled with joy and began neighing. The king's complexion was restored to its original state, like the sun recovering from an eclipse, and the strength of his body and the perceptive powers of his mind became many hundreds and thousands of times greater than they had been before. The queen was overjoyed, the great ministers and high officials took courage, the common people pressed their palms together in reverence, and the other countries bowed their heads....

At present the people of Japan number 4,994,828 men and women, all of them different persons but all alike infected by the three poisons. And these three poisons occur because of their relationship with Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. So all of these people at the same moment set out to curse, attack, banish and do away with Shakyamuni, Taho and all the other Buddhas of the ten directions. This is what leads to the appearance of the three minor calamities.

And now I wonder what karma from past existences has caused Nichiren and his associates to become the proponents of the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra? It seems to me that at present Bonten, Taishaku, the deities of the sun and moon, the Four Heavenly Kings, Tensho Daijin, Great Bodhisattva Hachiman and all the major and minor gods of the 3,132 shrines throughout Japan are like King Rinda of past times, that the white horses are Nichiren, and the white swans are my followers. The neighing of the white horses is the sound of our voices chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. When Bonten, Taishaku, the deities of the sun and moon, the Four Heavenly Kings and the others hear this sound, how could they fail to take on a healthy color and shine with a brilliant light? How could they fail to guard and protect us? We should be firmly convinced of this!

