

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SUMMER

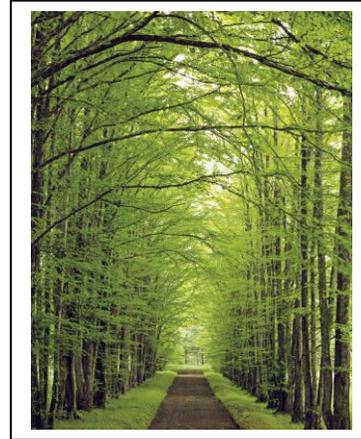
2008

## THE TRUE PURPOSE AND TRUE PATH OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM

Reverend Raido Hirota  
Mt. Holly, New Jersey  
June 2007

**QUESTION:** Why do you always criticize the Soka Gakkai<sup>1</sup>? Why can't we practice with an open heart to everyone?

**Reverend Raido Hirota (RH):** I practiced with the Gakkai up until 30 years ago. My parents were Gakkai members. Therefore I was of course a Gakkai member until I became a priest at the age of 12. The Gakkai does not lead its members to the Daishonin's teachings. They changed Daishonin's teachings to a belief in an absolute Ikeda and an absolute organization. That is why I admonish the Gakkai as Nikko Shonin<sup>2</sup> did with the five senior priests<sup>3</sup> before he left Minobu<sup>4</sup> and established Taisekiji<sup>5</sup> at the base of Mt. Fuji. I realized I could no longer continue to accept *gokuyo*<sup>6</sup> from Gakkai members while I remonstrated with the organization. That is why I parted with the Gakkai.



### In This Issue

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b><i>The True purpose and True path...</i></b> | <b>1</b>  |
| <b><i>The Spirit of Gohonzon</i></b>            | <b>7</b>  |
| <b><i>What Kind of Buddhism...</i></b>          | <b>9</b>  |
| <b><i>Letter to Niike</i></b>                   | <b>11</b> |

*The Middle Way* is published by  
Udumbara Foundation

Website: [www.udumbarafoundation.org](http://www.udumbarafoundation.org)

E-mail: [ufound@yahoo.com](mailto:ufound@yahoo.com)



Advisor: Reverend Raido Hirota

Founder and Editor-in-Chief: Peach Pair

**In this issue:** Translators: Kay Dubitsky and  
Takeko Jones

Contributing Editor: Karen Elders and Art Shapiro

All positions are voluntary

<sup>1</sup> Soka Gakkai – SGI – a lay or secular organization which uses some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in its own philosophy and practice.

<sup>2</sup> Nikko Shonin – Byakuren Ajari Nikko Shonin (1246-1333) – 2<sup>nd</sup> High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who received the transfer of the teachings directly from Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>3</sup> Five senior priests – (Jap. *Goroso*) – five priests of the six priests (not including Nikko Shonin) appointed senior priests by Nichiren Daishonin just before his death.

<sup>4</sup> Minobu – Mt. Minobu had been the center of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the latter years of the Daishonin's life and for the first seven years after his death.

<sup>5</sup> Taisekiji – the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.

<sup>6</sup> Gokuyo – a sacred offering or sacred contribution.

---

Taisekiji became the same as the Gakkai, believing in absolute power. They departed from Daishonin's teachings too. They started saying that the high priest was Nichiren Daishonin<sup>7</sup> at the present time. Both Taisekiji and the Gakkai have the same predisposition. They are just like North Korea. Can any other country get along well with a nation that believes in, respects, and worships an absolute person?

If you believe that you can practice with Taisekiji or the Gakkai, you don't have to leave them. It's not necessary for you to establish a relationship with me, or contact me. I need people who are seeking the true teachings, and who practice true shakubuku. I never want to increase the membership of my temple with people who are doing the wrong practice.

**Believer 1 (B1):** Many ex-Gakkai members have this view. They don't understand why they can't chant with Gakkai and Taisekiji members who are their friends. Why they, as Shoshin-kai followers, can't chant to a Gakkai Gohonzon<sup>8</sup> or a Nikken<sup>9</sup> Gohonzon with friends. Is there something else you can tell us besides being patient? Should we maintain their friendships? The sutra books are different, the Gohonzons are different, the religions are different. Should we practice together?

**RH:** In that case, no, you should not chant with them.

**B2:** What do we say to people who feel it's alright to go and chant to other Gohonzons because the people who have them are our friends?

**RH:** If I go to a friend's house and the friend says, I have a question in my heart about my religion, I don't really follow the Soka Gakkai belief; in that case you can chant with him and guide him in the right direction.

If a visitor comes to my temple from America or Europe or elsewhere, and does not understand the difference between Buddhisms, and sits in the sanctuary and chants "Namu-Amida-Butsu," I will explain the difference between Namu-Myogo-Renge-Kyo<sup>10</sup> and Namu-Amida-Butsu. Then I will ask him to chant with us. It's very important in a friendship to teach your friend about true Buddhism, even if it means losing the friendship.

**B3:** What about the opposite? You have friends in the Gakkai who come to visit you. I thought that it was one of the 26 Admonitions of Nikko Shonin not to sit with slanderers.

**RH:** If a Gakkai member comes to my temple and starts to chant, I will explain to him that what he believes in and what I believe in is different. Then I will ask him to please practice as we do.

To go to another religion's place of worship and join in their religious ceremony, whether it's Gakkai or a Christian religion or other, is not recommended, nor should you chant there.

If your friend does not slander while he is visiting you, it's okay to have a social visit. But don't chant with him. If he wants to chant, let him chant alone. And if he starts to slander and persists in slandering, then you must part company with him.

---

<sup>7</sup> Nichiren Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha. He 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.

<sup>8</sup> Gohonzon – the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism

<sup>9</sup> Nikken – Nikken Abe, the 67<sup>th</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu (Taisekiji).

<sup>10</sup> Namu-myoho-renge-kyo – the Mystic Law, the ultimate Law of life and death in the universe, the Buddha nature within all things.

---

If a non-believer visits and gives me fruit and asks me to put it on the altar as an offering to Gohonzon, I cannot accept it. If he gives it to me as a gift to eat, then I would eat it. We cannot accept a gift for the Gohonzon from non-believers, nor can we give gifts to an erroneous religion.

**B1:** If you visit a friend who is a Soka Gakkai or Taiseikiji member who is doubting his faith, do you chant with him to his Taiseikiji (Nikken or Nichinyo<sup>11</sup>) or Gakkai Gohonzon?

**RH:** No, I do not. You cannot chant to the wrong Gohonzon.

The Soka Gakkai is into politics and everything else. Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai should never participate in the activities of other religions, but the Soka Gakkai does. The Shoshin-kai is not involved in, nor does it participate in anything other than its own religion and its own religious activities.

**B1:** Is Nichiren Shoshu and Soka Gakkai participating in shrine ceremonies of other religions?

**B4:** In Japan, yes. And the Gakkai is also into politics. They make donations to other religions to advance their own political ambitions.

**B3:** Are you saying that Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu are making contributions to religious shrines belonging to other religions?

**RH:** I asked the Soka Gakkai member who visited me recently, what he thought about this. He said, “This kind of breach is just a small thing compared to *kosen-rufu*. If we can achieve *kosen-rufu*,” he said, “Then we will do it by any means.” The Gakkai member also said, “Nothing can punish you if you chant strongly for one hour and have strong faith.”

**B1:** Does the Gakkai believe that you can do anything you want? That you can chant, and it will be forgiven?

**RH:** The Gakkai member said, “Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin<sup>12</sup> would never punish them for what ever they do for *kosen-rufu*.”

**B1:** Would you ever chant to a Nikken or Nichinyo (the current high priest) Gohonzon?

**B3:** What if a friend was a SGI member who had a Nittatsu Shonin<sup>13</sup> Gohonzon that was properly enshrined, would you chant to it?

**RH:** No, I could not. Gohonzon is the embodiment of *ninpo-ikka* (oneness of person and the Law). Gohonzon is *ho (po)* – the Law. *Ikka* is the person who is praying to the Gohonzon. When you chant to Gohonzon, you and the Law become one. If the Gohonzon is real, but the person chanting to it believes in the wrong thing, the result is discord.

---

<sup>11</sup> Nichinyo – current (68<sup>th</sup>) high priest of Nichiren Shoshu (Taiseikiji).

<sup>12</sup> Nichimoku Shonin – Niidakyo Ajari Nichimoku (1260-1333) 3<sup>rd</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, inherited the true teachings of Nichiren Daishonin directly from Nikko Shonin.

<sup>13</sup> Nittatsu Shoshu – 66<sup>th</sup> high priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who died suddenly on July 22, 1979.

---

**B1:** That's the key issue. Many believers have friends in the Gakkai or Taisekiji who have Nittatsu Shonin Gohonzons and therefore think they can chant with them. Though the Gohonzon may be real, if the belief is wrong there is no true *ninpo-ikka*. Is that correct?

**RH:** Suppose a person has a Nittatsu Shonin Gohonzon and he follows Nikken or Nichinyo, or believes in another teaching, and I visit his house, I cannot join him in gongyo<sup>14</sup>. So, yes.

**B2:** The key is to try to explain to people how strict this practice is.

You have to dye your heart with the teaching.

**RH:** However, you can visit this person's house and chant to the Nittatsu Shonin Gohonzon alone, but not with others. That's okay. But you cannot stop if someone joins you. So it is better not to chant to it. The best thing to do is to chant silently by yourself.

For these other groups, to chant one million times is more important than the words they are actually saying. To chant Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo rapidly for a million times is not a religion from the heart. It's just chanting.

**B2:** There is a strictness about this faith. How can you explain the strictness of practice to other people?

**RH:** The four pillars of practice in this religion are faith, practice, study and shakubuku<sup>15</sup> (*shin, gyo, gaku* and *shakubuku*). It starts with morning and evening gongyo. Morning gongyo should be done right after you shower and wash your face. Evening gongyo is performed before dinner. For the beginner, doing morning and evening gongyo is a terrible torture. Studying a religion is not like studying a subject for a grade. Religion has to be absorbed into your soul. No matter how intelligent you are, you can easily grasp the wrong understanding. There's a great difference between scholastic aptitude and religious study.

**B3:** How should one read the gosho<sup>16</sup>?

**RH:** It is essential to your heart that you read it with your body and your soul.

**B3:** For something that is very theoretical, it's very easy to tackle it, to want to know it, and sometimes it's very complicated.

---

<sup>14</sup> Gongyo – morning and evening recitation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting of Namu-myoho-  
renge-kyo.

<sup>15</sup> Shakubuku – propagation of true Buddhism by refuting erroneous ideas and leading people to the correct teachings of Buddhism.

<sup>16</sup> Gosho – the sacred writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

---

**RH:** When I read the gosho, I imagine what the circumstances were when Nichiren Daishonin wrote it. What age he was. What was going on in the Daishonin's life. Also, what was going on in the life of the believer—whether the believer was sick or not. I think about the environment, and situation of the person Daishonin was writing to. Nichiren Daishonin himself said that he was Buddha, but in reading the gosho throughout you see that Daishonin is an ordinary person. He suffered as other people suffered, he got sick, he got angry, he expressed joy. His emotions and life experience were the same as all other human beings. So, I think of the person to whom he wrote his letter—that person's situation—and about Daishonin's situation too. I believe you must imagine the circumstances in which the letter was written, then you must try to understand Daishonin's heart at that time. That you understand the background of the letter and the Daishonin's heart at the time he wrote the letter is essential to your heart. You have to dye your heart with the teaching. Take it into your body and soul.

**B1:** Nichiren Daishonin talks about a “deeper shade of blue” when talking about developing one's faith. He said we should try to make our faith a deeper shade of blue, meaning to increasingly deepen it.

faith is to seek a deeper understanding  
and a deeper meaning

**B3:** Say Taiseikiji returns back to the teachings and starts practicing correctly. What happens to all the Gohonzons that were made and everything that was based on incorrect teachings? What would happen with all the incorrect teachings? What would happen with all the incorrect Nikken Gohonzons that were made? Would everyone have to get a new Gohonzon?

**RH:** I don't know what would happen. Some people in Nichiren Shoshu think that their foundation is too unstable and that the Soka Gakkai has a better organization.

The purpose of Nichiren Daishonin teachings is not to be in accord – to be agreeable and friendly. The purpose of Nichiren Daishonin teachings is enlightenment. It is good to get along. But that is not the purpose of the Buddha's teachings. The only purpose of the Buddha's teachings is *jobutsu*—enlightenment. Belief in a religion requires that you are satisfied and in accord only within yourself. It does not require a strong organization or a larger group. This religion might disintegrate tomorrow, but you may die today. Belonging to an organization and having faith in a religion are two completely different things. Just because you belong to a bigger organization, does not mean you have a strong faith. You live in America and you are American citizens. But not everyone here in America believes that America is doing what is right. Religion delves deeper into things. Religion—faith is to seek a deeper understanding and a deeper meaning. Everyone has different thinking—different beliefs. How deeply do you want to understand? The United States is not doing the right thing. Some people here may have doubts about what the country is doing, but they don't seek for a deeper understanding of what is wrong with the country's actions.

Soka Gakkai thinks that if you don't believe in their religion, then you are not in the right religion. You don't want to have an argument or an altercation – friends today, enemies tomorrow. It's not a child's game.

---

**B3:** How has the faith – the religion persisted from the Daishonin’s time? I’ve been thinking recently of the whole relationship between Taisekiji and Yoboji. A Gakkai book I read said the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 23<sup>rd</sup> high priests were from Yoboji. I don’t know if I trust how the Gakkai’s related the history.

Our tenet is to discover  
the way to live right and act right.

**RH:** Yoboji temple was located in Kyoto, the imperial capital of Japan. Third High Priest Nichimoku Shonin traveled to Kyoto to remonstrate with the emperor, but before he reached the capital he died. Two disciples, Nichigo and Nichizon, had accompanied Nichimoku Shonin on this trip. They both went on to Kyoto to deliver Nichimoku Shonin’s letters, but while Nichigo returned to Taisekiji with Nichimoku’s ashes, Nichizon remained in Kyoto where he, in 1339, established the temple Jogyo-in (which in 1536 after a fire was rebuilt and renamed Yoboji temple). But contrary to Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings, Nichizon erected a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha.

One of the tenets of Nichiren Shoshu is to not accept offerings (*gokuyo*) from non-believers. So when non-believers offered *gokuyo*, Taisekiji did not accept it. As a result, Taisekiji became poorer and poorer. Yoboji on the other hand, feared they would not survive if they conducted themselves the way Taisekiji did. So they loosened the tenets and accepted offerings from non-believers. In so doing they slandered. Since Taisekiji viewed Yoboji as a branch of their religion, it asked Yoboji for financial assistance. They did not know of Yoboji’s transgressions – how far they had strayed from the correct path by worshipping Shakyamuni Buddha and accepting *gokuyo* from non-believers.

With the money that Yoboji sent to Taisekiji they also sent priests to “straighten out” Taisekiji. The priests of Yoboji insinuated themselves into the affairs of Taisekiji and took over. The Taisekiji priests soon learned that the teachings of the priests of Yoboji were very wrong and slanderous, but they could not rid themselves of them. When time came to change the high priest, a replacement was sent from Yoboji to assume the position of the high priest of Taisekiji. This went on continuously for one hundred years.

Yoboji was financially well off, but they didn’t possess the roots of the religion and thus did not have power or clout. By providing the high priests continuously for Taisekiji they controlled the helm of Taisekiji and thus garnered power. Though Yoboji’s take over was a source of friction between the two temples, and there was constant squabbling between the two for one hundred years, both temples were influenced by the other. Taisekiji got money and learned that power easily impresses. Yoboji in Kyoto, on the other hand, recognized that they didn’t have the roots of the religion but had power and money, nevertheless they returned home realizing that Taisekiji’s teachings were important. They were both influenced in different ways. Taisekiji was negatively influenced learning how to be greedy, while Yoboji was positively influenced, learning the value of the correct teaching.

The 13<sup>th</sup> (Nichiin) to the 23<sup>rd</sup> (Nikkei) high priests came from Kyoto. As time went by Yoboji’s priests became aware that Taisekiji’s priests were correct in their teaching and that they at Yoboji were wrong.

The 26<sup>th</sup> high priest, Nichikan Shonin (1665-1726), actually came from Yoboji. He was a disciple of 18<sup>th</sup> high priest Nichie Shonin. Nichikan Shonin was the high priest who restored the correct path of Nichiren Shoshu to Taisekiji.

---

The current high priest at Taisekiji, Nichinyo, and the previous, Nikken, are saying that they are the reincarnation of Nichiren Daishonin. That is wrong. Nichiren Daishonin said that he would not be coming back. There is no such thing as reincarnation.

We in the Shoshin-kai<sup>17</sup> are a small group. We don't have money; we don't have power or anything else. Our goal is not to become associates of SGI or Taisekiji so as to gain money, power or influence. Our tenet is to discover the way to live right and act right. Wealth and power do not determine the correct and true religion. You don't have to compete with SGI or Taisekiji. SGI thinks that the Shoshin-kai are sore losers. They think that a great religion is determined by the size of its membership, wealth and power. There is no writing that describes religion this way. The young Soka Gakkai man who visited me said, "You can do anything for *kosen-rufu*<sup>18</sup>." But that is not true. What they think about *kosen-rufu* or what *kosen-rufu* means to them is crazy. *Kosen-rufu* is recognizing the enlightenment of all living beings.

**QUESTIONS: Why do Nichiren Daishonin's teachings have to be kept absolutely pure? Why can't Taisekiji, Shoshin-kai and SGI chant together? After all we practice the same religion.**

RH: I believe the teachings have to be absolutely pure. I believe it is absolutely impossible for Taisekiji, Shoshin-kai and SGI to chant together, because they are not the same religion. Daishonin's teaching is that the Buddha nature is in all life. How can I practice with an organization that teaches that you cannot become enlightened if you don't do as "I" say, and that you won't get benefits if you don't do as I say. The practices of Taisekiji and SGI are similar to ours. But their practices are absolutely wrong.

---

## THE SPIRIT OF THE GOHONZON

Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, New Jersey

June 2007

**QUESTION: Which is the central component of our religious practice: Namu-myoho-renge-kyo or the Gohonzon?**

**RH:** In "Reply to Kyo'o" Nichiren Daishonin said, "I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in *sumi*, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. The Buddha's will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Namu-myoho-renge-kyo." The Gohonzon is inscribed by Nichiren with his heart and soul, so believe in it. This is saying that basically Shakyamuni Buddha's<sup>19</sup> heart is the

---

<sup>17</sup> Shoshin-kai – the division of Nichiren Shoshu priests who are united to protect, defend and propagate Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.

<sup>18</sup> Kosen-rufu – widespread propagation of true Buddhism.

<sup>19</sup> Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 B.C. – 949 B.C.) historical Buddha born in India.

---

There is only one way to become enlightened, and that is to practice the way  
Nichiren Daishonin did, and the way Nichiren Daishonin taught.

Lotus Sutra. The goshō also says that ultimately the spirit of Nichiren is nothing other than Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō. The basis of Gohonzon is Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō. Gohonzon equals Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō. What is written to the left and right of Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō on Gohonzon is only a supplementary explanation of Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō.

You cannot separate Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō from the venerable Gohonzon. The Gohonzon exists to illustrate to you that Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō is in the universe. You think you are worshipping Gohonzon, but that is actually not the case. You are not worshipping Gohonzon; rather you go through Gohonzon to Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō. You reach out to Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō through Gohonzon.

**B1:** So we are not worshipping a piece of paper?

**RH:** No. Because it is difficult to imagine the existence of Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō in the universe, you have Gohonzon. Daishonin inscribed Gohonzon to make it easier for us. The venerable Gohonzon is a reflecting mirror. If you practice to the venerable Gohonzon correctly, you will become enlightened. There is only one way to become enlightened, and that is to practice the way Nichiren Daishonin did, and the way Nichiren Daishonin taught.

**QUESTION:** Nichiren Shoshu says Gohonzon has to be consecrated and SGI says it does not. Which is true? I am very confused.

**RH:** Yes, it must be consecrated. The consecration ceremony in Japanese is called *kaigen*. “*Kai*” means to open. “*Gen*” means heart. Thus *kaigen* means opening the heart. The consecration ceremony or *kaigen* is not only performed for Gohonzons, *juzu*<sup>20</sup> and the gravesites also need to be consecrated. Would you worship a scroll just because someone has written Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō on it? Would you believe in that?

There are so many religions in the world that chant Namu-myōhō-rengē-kyō. But each one of them teaches something different. In Nichiren Shoshu the object of worship and Daishonin’s teachings must be in accord. Only then can you receive *gojukai*<sup>21</sup> and Gohonzon. Don’t be arrogant and think that you can practice any way you choose. Don’t forget that at the beginning of your practice you didn’t know anything about the teachings, and you started your belief with a pure heart and received *gojukai*, which is the consecration ceremony for the believer. It is also very important for you to have a consecration ceremony.

It may be good enough for the Gakkai to have an object of worship that looks like a Gohonzon, but you should know that their teaching is not the Daishonin’s teaching. They follow the guidance of Daisaku Ikeda. Their activities are centered on Ikeda and not on the Law. That is why they don’t need a consecration ceremony.

---

<sup>20</sup> Juzu – prayer beads

<sup>21</sup> Gojukai – conversion ceremony for individuals to accept faith in Nichiren Daishonin’s true Buddhism.

---

**B1:** It's all about opening the heart. The Gakkai doesn't recognize that they are not practicing a religion. Theirs is a completely secular practice.

**B2:** I recently had a conversation with a Gakkai member. He called the consecration ceremony "mumbo jumbo."

**B1:** Is it true that you cannot become enlightened without a consecration ceremony? If so, since the Gakkai does not have such a ceremony, their practice is not for attaining enlightenment. If you are not opening the heart of the object of worship, and you yourself do not receive *gojukai*, then you are not in fact opening the heart of the Buddha.

**B2:** They feel very sincerely that they are practicing Daishonin's teachings.

**B1:** How do they explain the several goshō where Nichiren Daishonin discusses the "eye opening ceremony" and performs eye opening ceremonies for images of Shakyamuni Buddha, and also for "wooden and painted images"?

**B2:** There are Gakkai priests.

**B4:** Before Taiseikiji and Gakkai separated, the Gakkai used Taiseikiji priests for *gojukai*. But recently I met an old Gakkai friend who said that the Gakkai shakubukus a lot of Americans. When I asked her about *gojukai* she asked, "What's that?" When I asked about priests, she said, "Why do you need priests?"

**B3:** I joined the Gakkai in '94, when the split with Taiseikiji was very fresh. And they had explained that it was the true faith of the believers that was *kaigen*, and that the priest was not a necessary intermediary. Just the faith of the believer gave the Gohonzon its sanctity. But now it seems as though they have eroded it even further. I haven't had anything to do with them for years and years and years.

**RH:** When the split occurred between Taiseikiji and SGI, some priests (the so-called reform priests) went with SGI and became Soka Gakkai priests. They cannot conduct ceremonies, they are just figureheads. They are used solely for the purpose of propaganda. They wear three piece suits and go door to door preaching about the evils of Taiseikiji. Otherwise they have no contact with believers, and never wear the robes of a priest.

**B1:** Are they real priests?

**B4:** They came from Taiseikiji. They believe that SGI is doing the right thing. They are the "reformed priests."

**B5:** They have money, nice buildings and nice cars.

**B1:** Is Jodo Nishida one of these priests?

---

**RH:** Yes. He's a Gakkai priest. He remonstrates with the high priest to tell him how wrong he is.

---

## **WHAT KIND OF BUDDHISM DO YOU PRACTICE?**

**Reverend Raido Hirota**

**Mt. Holly, New Jersey**

**June 2007**

**QUESTION:** Often times, when someone expresses interest in my Buddhist practice, they ask: "What kind of Buddhism do you practice?" Most Americans seem to be familiar with Tibetan Buddhism or Zen, but have no idea about Nichiren Buddhism. How would you answer the question: "What kind of Buddhism do you practice?"

**RH:** It's not only Americans; most Japanese don't know Daishonin's Buddhism. Shakyamuni did not teach Tibetan Buddhism, nor did he teach Zen scriptures. Shakyamuni was born in this world to preach the Lotus Sutra, which states that all life is equal to Buddha's life, and all life is endowed with the Buddha's life of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. Nichiren Daishonin put this ultimate Law into practice and sets an example for people to follow. I would tell people that I believe in this Law.

I don't think Buddhism itself is well known. I think just the Dalai Lama is very famous.

**B1:** Do we need to study these other Buddhisms, especially those that are popular, so that we can have an intelligent conversation? Or should we just tell people about the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo?

**RH:** Many Americans are interested in Asian culture. They think there's something mystic in it. Perhaps that's why they are interested in Asian religions.

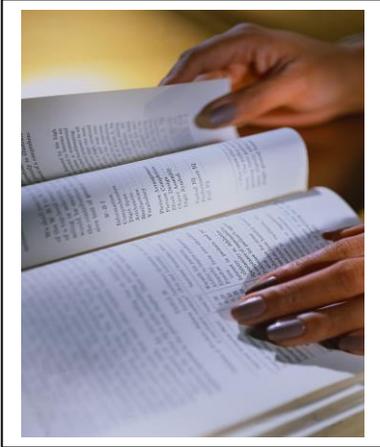
**B1:** I think there are many different reasons why people in the U.S. are interested in Buddhism. Some people have problems, so they are attracted to the Gakkai's Buddhism where they are taught to chant to solve their problems. There are also affluent Americans with a heightened interest in things that are different and who also tend to question whether there is more to life than what they have accumulated or achieved. They are interested in the mystic, but not to the extent of seeking enlightenment. They won't actually practice, but they toy with and are intrigued by the idea.

**RH:** What was the reason you left your other religion before you joined the Soka Gakkai?

**B3:** I was raised Catholic. I just couldn't believe in God. I was attracted to Buddhism. I was into Zen, although I didn't practice it. It was an alluring idea to be able to center yourself and to be almost unflappable to all that occurs around you. To reach a higher point of consciousness.

---

**RH:** You cannot pinpoint what the teaching of Tibetan Buddhism is or what the purpose of the teaching is. If a person is born on the same date as Bodhisattva Kannon (Skt. Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion) he is chosen as the next Dalai Lama. But there isn't a meaning to the religion. The disciples and followers of the Dalai Lama worship him because he is the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Kannon. In the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra Bodhisattva Kannon assumes 33 different forms and appears anywhere in the world to save people from suffering. In the *Muryoju* Sutra (Sutra of the Buddha of Infinite Life) Bodhisattva Kannon appears as an attendant to Amida Buddha. Followers of the Dalai Lama refer to him as "wish-fulfilling jewel," or his holiness. The second ranking lama, the Panchen Lama (great scholar) is considered the reincarnation of Amida Buddha.



The Dalai Lama went in exile in India and became the elder of Tibetan refugees in India. It cannot be said that the Tibetan people have been saved from suffering; rather they have been beset with nothing but problems.

You need to learn something about another person's religion before you shakubuku that person. You need to know how much they know about their own religion. To have a religious discussion you need to understand the other person's thoughts. You will need to either rise to the person's level or come down to the person's level. But you must first study and gain knowledge of your own religion. If you don't, and you study another religion, you risk learning more about the other religion and forgetting your own. Then you will get lost and join the other religion.

You have to understand and take into your body and soul the bone and marrow of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. Then you can study other religions and have discussions about other religions on a higher level of understanding.



---

# GOSHO SELECTION

*EXCERPT*

## “LETTER TO NIKE”<sup>22</sup>

WHAT JOY to have been born in the Latter Day of the Law<sup>23</sup> and to have shared in the propagation of true Buddhism! How pitiful are those who, though born in this time, cannot believe in the Lotus Sutra!

No one can escape death once he is born as a human being, so why do you not practice in preparation for the next life? When I observe what people are doing, I realize that although they profess faith in the Lotus Sutra and clasp its scrolls, they act against the spirit of the sutra and thereby readily fall into the evil paths. To illustrate, a person has five major internal organs, but should even one of them become diseased, it will infect all the others and eventually he will die. The Great Teacher Dengyo<sup>24</sup> stated, "Even though one praises the Lotus Sutra, he destroys its heart." He meant that even if one embraces, reads and praises the Lotus Sutra, if he betrays its intent, he will be destroying not only Shakyamuni but all other Buddha in the universe.

The sum of our worldly misdeeds and evil karma may be as great as Mount Sumeru<sup>25</sup>, but once we take faith in this sutra, they will vanish like frost or dew under the sun of the Lotus Sutra. However, if one commits even one or two of the fourteen slanders<sup>26</sup> set forth in this sutra, his offense is almost impossible to expiate. Killing a single Buddha would be a far greater offense than destroying all living beings in the universe, and to violate the sutra's spirit is to commit the sin of destroying all Buddhas. One who commits any of these fourteen is a slanderer.

Hell is a dreadful dwelling of fire, and Hunger is a pitiful state where starving people devour their own children. Anger is strife, and Animality is to kill or be killed. The hell of the blood-red lotus is so called because the intense cold of this hell makes one double over until his back splits open and the bloody flesh emerges like a crimson lotus flower. And there are hells even more horrible. Once one falls into such an evil state, even a throne or the title of general means nothing. He is no different from a monkey on a string, tormented by the guards of hell. What use are his fame and fortune then? Can he still be arrogant and persist in his false beliefs?

Stop and ponder! How rare is the faith that moves one to give alms to a priest who knows the heart of the Lotus Sutra! He will not stray into the evil paths if he does so even once. Still greater are the benefits arising from ten or twenty contributions, or from five years, ten years, or a lifetime of contributions. They are even beyond the measure of the Buddha's wisdom. The Buddha taught that the

---

<sup>22</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 1, p. 253

<sup>23</sup> Latter Day of the Law – (Jap. *Mappo*) – the period beginning 2000 years after Shakyamuni Buddha's death, when the true Buddhas will make his advent.

<sup>24</sup> The Great Teacher Dengyo – (767-822) – Founder of the Tendai sect in Japan

<sup>25</sup> Mount Sumeru – in ancient Indian cosmology Sumeru was the highest mountain in the center of the world.

<sup>26</sup> Fourteen slanders – 14 slanders against Buddhism are; 1) arrogance towards Buddhism; 2) negligence in Buddhist practice; 3) arbitrary, egotistical judgment about Buddhism; 4) shallow, self-satisfied understanding; 5) adherence to earthly desires; 6) lack of seeking spirit; 7) lack of faith; 8) aversion; 9) deluded doubt; 10) slander; 11) contempt; 12) hatred; 13) jealousy; and 14) grudges.

---

blessings of a single offering to the votary of this sutra are a hundred thousand myriad times greater than those of offering boundless treasure to Shakyamuni for more than eight billion aeons. When you embrace this sutra, you will overflow with happiness and shed tears of joy. It seems impossible to repay our debt to Shakyamuni, but by your frequent offerings to me deep in these mountains you will repay the merciful kindness of the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni Buddha. Strive ever harder in faith and never give in to negligence. Everyone appears to believe sincerely when he first embraces the Lotus Sutra, but as time passes, he tends to become less devout; he no longer reveres nor serves the priest and arrogantly forms distorted views. This is most frightening. Be diligent in developing your faith until the last moment of your life. Otherwise you will have regrets. For example, the journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop on the twelfth, how can you admire the moon over the capital? No matter what, be close to the priest who knows the heart of the Lotus Sutra, keep learning from him the truth of Buddhism and continue your journey of faith.

How swiftly the days pass! It makes us realize how short are the years we have left. Friends enjoy the cherry blossoms together on spring mornings and then they are gone, carried away like the blossoms by the winds of impermanence, leaving nothing but their names. Although the blossoms have scattered, the cherry trees will bloom again with the coming of spring, but when will those people be reborn? The companions with whom we composed poems praising the moon on autumn evenings have vanished with the moon behind the shifting clouds. Only their mute images remain in our hearts. The moon has set behind the western mountains, yet we shall compose poetry under it again next autumn. But where are our companions who have passed away? Even when the approaching Tiger of Death roars, we do not hear. How many more days are left to the sheep bound for slaughter?

Deep in the Snow Mountains<sup>27</sup> lives a bird called Kankucho which, tortured by the numbing cold, cries that it will build a nest in the morning. Yet, when the day breaks, it sleeps away the hours in the warm light of the morning sun without building its nest. So it continues to cry vainly throughout its life. The same is true of people. When they fall into hell and suffocate in its flames, they long to be reborn as humans and vow to put everything else aside and serve the three treasures in order to attain enlightenment in their next life. But even on the rare occasions when they happen to be reborn human, the winds of fame and fortune blow violently and the lamp of Buddhist practice is easily extinguished. They squander their wealth without a qualm on meaningless trifles but begrudge even the smallest contribution to the Buddha, the Law, and the Priest. This is very serious, for then they are being hindered by messengers from hell. This is the meaning of "Good by the inch invites evil by the yard."

Furthermore, since this is a land whose people slander the Lotus Sutra, the gods who would be protecting them thirst for the Law and ascend to heaven, forsaking their shrines. The empty shrines are occupied by demons who mislead the worshippers. The Buddha, his teachings completed, returned to eternal paradise. Temples and shrines were abandoned to become the dwellings of devils. These imposing structures stand in rows, built at state expense, and still the people suffer. These are not merely my own words; they are found in the sutras, so you should learn them well.

Neither Buddhas nor gods would ever accept contributions from those who slander the Law. Then how can we human beings accept them? The deity of Kasuga Shrine proclaimed through an oracle that he would accept nothing from those with impure hearts, though he should have to eat the flames of burning copper; that he would refuse to set foot in their homes, though he should have to sit on red-hot copper. He would rather come down to a miserable hut with weeds choking the passageway, or to a poor thatched cottage. He declared that he would never visit the unfaithful even if they hung sacred festoons for a thousand days to welcome him, but that he would go to a house where the people believe, no matter how others might shun their wretchedness. Lamenting that slanderers overturn this

---

<sup>27</sup> Snow Mountains – the Himalayas.

---

country, the gods abandoned it and ascended to heaven. "Those with impure hearts" means those who refuse to embrace the Lotus Sutra, as is stated in the fifth volume of the Lotus Sutra. If the gods themselves regard alms from slanderers as "flames of burning copper," how could we common mortals possibly consume them? If someone were to kill our parents and then try to offer us some gift, could we possibly accept it? Not even sages or saints can avoid the hell of incessant suffering if they accept offerings from slanderers. Nor should you associate with slanderers, for if you do, you will share the same guilt as they. This you should fear above all.



Have a wonderful summer!