

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SUMMER

2014

## THE MEANING OF FAITH

Reverend Raido Hirota

International Meeting

November 2012

### The Meaning of Faith<sup>1</sup>

What we call faith is nothing extraordinary. As a woman cherishes her husband, as a man will give his life for his wife, as parents will not abandon their children, or as a child refuses to leave his mother, so should we put our trust in the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni, Taho, and all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, as well as the heavenly gods and benevolent deities, and chant Namumyōhōrengekyō. This is what is meant by faith. Moreover, you should ponder the sutra passages, "Honestly discarding the provisional teachings" and "Not accepting even a single verse from any of the other sutras" and never be of a mind to abandon them, just as a woman will not throw away her mirror or as a man always wears his sword.

Respectfully,  
Nichiren

The eighteenth day of the fifth month  
May 18, 1280  
To Myoichi-ama

<sup>1</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 5, p 303



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### *The Middle Way*

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**Believer 1 (B1):** Could you please explain in more depth what Nichiren Daishonin<sup>2</sup> meant in this gosho<sup>3</sup>?

**Reverend Raido Hirota (RH):** People tend to believe that you and the Gohonzon<sup>4</sup> are separate entities; but in Nichiren Daishonin's teaching it is explained that the essence of the Gohonzon exists within your soul. Of course, it's obvious that the Gohonzon is a physical object that exists outside of your body; but the essential core, or the heart and soul of Gohonzon is alive. By looking at Gohonzon, you are reminded that that life is actually within you, and that the Gohonzon is a representation of the life that exists within you.

Let's take a married couple for example. Marriage means you accept the good and the bad about the other person. Your life and the other person's life are intertwined. There is no dividing line or separation between a wife and a husband. In other words, to love is to step into another person's life and let the other person do the same in your life. Faith in Nichiren Shoshu<sup>5</sup> is the same. The examples that the Daishonin used in the gosho and those that I will use here are metaphors to help you understand the relationship between faith and yourself.

Another interesting example is that of a parent and child. One of my parishioners in Japan is a social worker who helps abused children. The social worker told me about a

<sup>2</sup> Nichiren Daishonin - (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

<sup>3</sup> Gosho - the individual and collective writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>4</sup> Gohonzon - the scroll that is the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, representing the universal Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and the Buddha-nature in all things.

<sup>5</sup> Nichiren Shoshu - a sect of Buddhism that embraces and recites the true Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō as the original cause of enlightenment and believes in Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

child who was being abused by her mother. The child's school had informed the social worker that the child was in danger. To save the child, the social worker went to the home to try to remove her and bring her to safety. But even though the girl is being abused by her mother, the girl cried out to the mother for help, and regarded the social worker as an enemy who was trying to do her harm. The mother, who didn't want the child to be taken away, opposed the social worker. So, both the child and the mother resisted the social worker and held her in disdain. For the social worker, who was making every effort to protect the child and has the child's best interest at heart, it is a huge pressure to bear. The love between a child and a parent is like that. Logic does not really apply. Their love is steadfast no matter what is going on. Even when the child's life is in jeopardy, the child seeks help and still wants to be loved by the person who is abusing her. Faith in Nichiren Shoshu is the same way. I don't mean to say that you are being abused by this religion. What I mean to say is that faith requires that kind of fundamental trust.

One other example can be relayed through an old Japanese tale. There was once an underwater castle where a king and his daughter, the princess, lived. One day the princess took sick, so the king took the princess to a medicine man. The medicine man told the king to go up to the surface of the ocean and swim to shore, whereupon he should find a monkey. The medicine man instructed, "If you can get a monkey's liver and feed it to the princess, it is the best cure for her illness." So the king immediately returned to the castle, hopped on the back of one of his turtles and roared up to the surface of the ocean. When they reached the shore the king went inland in search of a monkey. Soon he came upon a solitary monkey resting in a tree. The king very politely addressed the monkey, "Hello there. I would like to invite you to my palace under the sea. Would you like to join me?" The monkey looked down at the king and noted that he looked like a man of importance, so he replied, "Sure, I'd love to visit your underwater palace." So the king and the monkey returned to the shore and climbed on the turtle's back. Just as they were preparing to make their descent to the bottom of the ocean, the king thought to ask the monkey matter-of-factly so as not raise suspicions, "Oh, by the way, do you have your liver with you?" The monkey thought, "That's a strange question." Then he realized that they were going to kill him for his liver, so he replied, "Oh no. I forgot to bring my liver. Wait here while I fetch it. I'll return quickly." The monkey jumped off the turtles back just as the turtle was descending and ran into the woods to save his life. The king and the turtle waited and waited, but the monkey never returned. The point here is that the king and the turtle did not know that the liver was inside the monkey's body. They didn't know that it was not a separate thing that could be left somewhere, and that functions on its own.

Namumyōhōrengekyō<sup>6</sup> and we are the same as the monkey and its liver. Namumyōhōrengekyō is not separate from us. We and Namumyōhōrengekyō are one and the same. Namumyōhōrengekyō is within each of us, and the relationship that each of us has

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<sup>6</sup> Namumyōhōrengekyō - the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

with Namumyōhōrengekyō is unbreakable. To realize this is to have faith in this religion. But, as long as you think that you and Namumyōhōrengekyō are separate, it does not count as having faith. This also applies to the other examples I've cited. The wife and husband it would seem are two separate individuals, but they are not. Their lives are inseparable. They are conjoined. The same is true with the mother and child. There is an unbreakable bond between the two. And the same holds true for the monkey and its liver. The monkey cannot thrive without its liver. They cannot be separated. The two are one. Thus is faith in this religion. You just can't break it. The Lotus Sutra<sup>7</sup> explains that believers need to believe that the Buddha-nature<sup>8</sup> is within them. The Lotus Sutra is the only teaching that explains that the Buddha-nature is within. To look for the Buddha-nature somewhere else, or in something other than inside yourself is the same as denying that it is the truth.

There was a time in Japan when a woman always carried a mirror so that she would always look presentable and beautiful, and when a man always carried a sword next to his hip like a samurai. . This was the custom. It was not to hurt others, but rather to protect and aid others and oneself. Within the culture of the samurai there was an understanding that the samurai's sword was his spirit. So to not carry the sword at all times was unthinkable. Samurai always carried their swords with them. The Lotus Sutra explains that to have faith in a religion is the same. You always have it with you, no matter what.

To have a faith where you ask for help — "oh please help me" — is not the right attitude, and is not the way to have faith. True faith is, 1) to realize that you have the Buddha-nature within you, 2) to live your life accordingly so that you are a worthy or suitable being to possess the Buddha-nature, 3) to not forget that you have the essence of Namumyōhōrengekyō within and, 4) to not lose sight of this fact. Even though you already possess this Buddha-nature, striving to become a person who is worthy of hosting the essence of Namumyōhōrengekyō is one of the requirements of a believer.

Not long ago it was reported in the news that people who believed in Islam were burning or otherwise destroying, and showing no regard for statues, idols and other objects of worship of other religions. But when someone burned, defaced, or showed disrespect for the Quran they would cause a riot and declare jihad. It is my understanding that Christianity, Judaism, and Islam all have the same origin. All three sprang from the same Abrahamic tradition. Christianity, in particular, created idols such as the cross, Virgin Mary, angels, saints and such, and they approach people from the weakest human frailty or position, by saying, "Jesus will save you." They tell people to pray to the idols for help, or protection: "Help me. Save me. Protect me." These are the symbols and messages Christianity used to develop into a worldwide religion. Moslems, on the other hand, do not have an object to which they pray, but everyday, no matter where they are in the world, they kneel in the direction of Mecca to pray. So as I was watching the news I thought, these people may not

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<sup>7</sup> Lotus Sutra - the highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, taught in the last eight years of his life. It reveals that all life has Buddha-nature, and that the life of Buddha, and all life is eternal.

<sup>8</sup> Buddha-nature - the inherent cause or potential at the core of one's life that allows anyone to realize Buddhahood.

have an object of worship, but Mecca is their symbol of faith which is enshrined in their hearts.

For the religion of Nichiren Shoshu, Gohonzon has a physical form. It is an object of worship that represents the teaching that Namumyōhōrengekyō, the essence of the Buddha-nature, is inside you. Gohonzon reminds us of that. That is its purpose. Gohonzon is not to be used as an object that you beseech for your wishes to come true. That is not its purpose. So when you practice this religion, remember the unbreakable bond that exists between you and Gohonzon.

Unlike Islam, should someone burn Gohonzon, or burn the Gosho, there is no need for those of us who believe in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism to start a riot because there is no meaning in doing so. This is because the teaching that the Gohonzon represents is within you. It is my hope that more and more you will feel Gohonzon in your heart and practice this teaching correctly.

**Believer 2 (B2):** To feel it in our hearts more and more, I assume means to strengthen our faith. And we do that by chanting, studying and realization?

**RH:** The writing on Gohonzon explains what is contained within our lives. It is not about something outside you. It is not about other people, other beings, or other things. It's about you. So what is written on Gohonzon is about you, Believer 2. To use a metaphor, Gohonzon is a mirror that is reflecting your inner self. So when you look at it, you see yourself in it. It is my wish that you practice this religion from that perspective. You are the starting point. And that point is not outside of you, it is within you. So what you can do to strengthen your faith is to study Nichiren Daishonin's teachings one by one. And as you study them take a "heart picture" – that is, absorb them, feel them in your heart, take them into your life – so that they become a part of you. I point this out because for those of you who have practiced under the Soka Gakkai<sup>9</sup>, you have been trained to believe in things outside of you, and taught that what you are looking for is outside of you. So you chant to Gohonzon and ask for this and that. But that is not what Nichiren Daishonin taught. That is not what his teachings are about. So people who have come from a practice or a teaching that had a false understanding of this religion, I want you to reset the premise of this religion in your mind, and realize that what you are seeking is not outside you. It is within. That would be one of the ways to strengthen your faith.



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<sup>9</sup> Soka Gakkai - SGI – Soka Gakkai International – a lay organization that wrongly incorporates some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism into its own philosophy and practice.

# THE MEANING OF KARMA

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

December 2012

**QUESTION:** What is karma, and how should we understand it? Is karma action? Is it result or effect? Or is it simply taking responsibility for our lot in life? Not begrudging or resenting life and thus taking action to better ourselves and our surroundings?

**Reverend Raido Hirota (RH):** For those of you who practiced with another religion before you practiced Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, what understanding did the other religion have concerning karma?

**Believer 1 (B1):** Christianity doesn't have any conception of karma. It is not within their system of belief.

**Believer 2 (B2):** I haven't belong to any other religion, but when I talk to people of other religions, they always think of karma as a bad thing, where someone did something bad in the past and it comes back to haunt them.

**RH:** Say there is a person who is handicap. How do they explain that in Christianity?

**B3:** In Christianity there isn't a concept of karma because you don't have other lifetimes. The talk about the hereafter, but life isn't eternal in Christianity. They explain someone's infirmity or deformity or misfortune as "God's will." Or they say it's because the parents are evil, or someone in the family is evil, or God wants to test them.

**RH:** Another question. If any of you had a preconception of karma based on previous beliefs in another religion, does that past belief interfere with understanding karma as taught by this religion?

**All Believers:** No.

**RH:** The reason I asked these questions is because I wanted to know whether your past religions are still influencing or biasing your view and understanding of karma. One more question. After studying and learning the Daishonin's definition of karma, is there something that scares you or is confusing, or makes you uneasy?

**B2:** What is the real definition of karma?

**RH:** In Buddhism, karma, or *go* in Japanese, is the foundation of your life. Things like your body, your mind, your heart, are all constituent parts of your life, but the foundation of your life is karma. Your gender, your nationality, the era in which you were born, your body type (tall, short, heavy, slim, beautiful, unattractive), who your parents are, who your siblings are, and circumstances or conditions that you were born into, in addition to many other things, these are the predetermined things at birth. They constitute your fixed karma. These are things you could not choose. You could not choose your parents, your skin color, and the shape of your eyes. You could not choose whether your family was rich or poor. These things you could not pick and choose before you were born.

To further explain, a person may be happy at times about being born male or female; or happy about the parents he or she has. But at other times one may hate his or her gender, or may be really unhappy with his parents. The fact is, the feelings that you have about your circumstances may change, but the condition has not changed. Your parents are who they are; your gender is what it is. That's karma. There is no good karma or bad karma. The reality is that the condition stays the same—you are who you are, or the condition is what it is.—but what changes is your perception of the condition. How you perceive or view your situation, circumstance or condition is what changes. What doesn't change is that the condition has a good side and a bad side like two sides of a coin with one side being heads and the other being tails. But it's the same coin.

When you say the word karma, most people, even the Japanese, think it's a bad thing. However, I would like you to understand karma from the perspective that it has a good side and a bad side which cannot be separated. There aren't two kinds of karma: good karma and bad karma. It's one thing. It's just karma.

In Buddhism, karma has two aspects. One is predetermined, fixed, or immutable karma (*jōgō*)—the karma that was prearranged at birth. These conditions cannot be changed. They would be your gender, physical characteristics, parents, etc. That constitutes 50% of your life. The other 50% is changeable or mutable karma (*fujōgō*). This karma is the direction that you choose in life: what kind of job you have, what you study, who you want to become. These are things determined by you in this lifetime.

In the teachings of the Lotus Sutra it is explained that poison can turn into medicine. Let's say, for example, something bad happens to you. Even though you don't like it, happiness is hidden within it. Even if the incident is devastating, and it doesn't appear as though anything good can come of it. It can still turn into medicine for you.

**B3:** I heard in the past that children live their parent's karma until they are the age of 17 or 18, then their karma becomes dominant. Is that true? I'm thinking about the 20 children who were massacred in Sandy Hook, Connecticut and the 10 young girls who were blown up in

Afghanistan when they were out collecting wood. Is it their karma that they should come to such and end? Is it the parent's karma? Or is it collective karma (societal karma)? Which is it?

**RH:** Let's say there is a baby—an infant—who got sick. It is possible that the infant could die because the illness is so grave. While the baby is fighting for its life, it doesn't understand what it is going through. If the baby survives, later in life it won't remember how sick it was, or how painful the experience was. At such a young age he or she didn't understand the meaning of life and death, or the difference between the two. But when the infant was fighting for its life, the parents anguished and may have even thought, "If I could save my child's life by giving up mine, I would be happy to do it." At this point the child's karma is connected to the parent's karma. It's not about a certain age. A child's karma is connected to a parent's karma until the child becomes independent. The stage when a child cannot survive on its own without the help of its parents, the child's karma or destiny is the parents' karma.

Let's remember that there are two aspects to karma: 50% is fixed or immutable (*jōgō*)—the conditions at birth; and 50% are changeable or mutable (*fujōgō*)—what you create and determine while you are alive. Moreover, another fixed karma that you were born with is the Buddha-nature. That is something you always have within you. And while this is so, it seems everyone has a hard time understanding this fact, or accepting it. Even though this is the teaching, you will sometimes forget it. Nonetheless, I hope you will believe and trust in this faith, and know that you all have Buddha-nature within you. Please keep this in mind, and cherish this belief. It is the truth. You do have the Buddha-nature inside you.

In some religions they say if you were bad, or if you don't believe in the religion during your lifetime, then you will go to hell when you die.—and that's the end of it. The Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, teaches that even if you are in hell, because you have the Buddha-nature in you, you can become Buddha. So in this religion there is always the possibility of becoming a Buddha.

In the Japanese language the word for occupation has two characters. The second character is the same Chinese character that is used for karma (*gō*-業). Even if it is a job that you might not like, it is still your livelihood—your way of earning a living and sustaining your life. Also, when you get sick with an illness that is difficult to overcome, the word, again, ends in the same Chinese character 業. These are examples of karma. As you live your life there are many things that happen to you. But no matter what happens, or what condition you find yourself in, the fact is that Buddha-nature is always there inside you. And this is your karma too. The Buddha-nature is a fixed, unchangeable karma. Please trust and believe in this and carry through with your practice and faith no matter what.



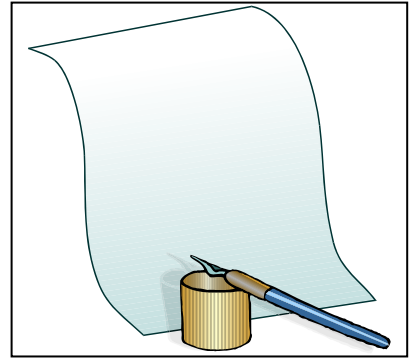


# GOSHO SELECTION

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*Excerpts*

## LETTER TO HOREN<sup>10</sup>



....

The great being known as a Buddha is a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand times superior to the various persons described above. A Buddha is invariably distinguished by thirty-two features. Among these features are a pure and far-reaching voice, an unseen crown of the head, a knot of flesh on the head like a topknot, a tuft of white hair between the eyebrows, and markings of the thousand-spoked wheel. Of these thirty-two features, each one was acquired as the result of a hundred blessings.

....

Devadatta<sup>11</sup> [the Buddha's cousin] had thirty of the distinctive features, but lacked the tuft of white hair and the markings of the thousand-spoked wheel. Because he lacked two of the features that distinguish the Buddha, he was afraid that his disciples would belittle him. So he gathered fireflies and stuck them between his eyebrows to resemble the tuft of white hair. And for the markings of the thousand-spoked wheel, he had a blacksmith make pieces of iron in the shape of chrysanthemum blossoms and tried to stick them on the soles of his feet, but he succeeded only in burning his feet. The burns grew worse until he was at the point of death, when he confessed to the Buddha what he had done. The Buddha then stroked the burns with his hand and all the pain went away.

One might suppose that Devadatta would then repent and reform his ways, but instead he went about telling people that Gautama<sup>12</sup> practiced petty healing tricks and that he resorted to magic.

And yet the Buddha harbored no grudges, even against such enemies. How, then, could he ever cast aside anyone who had even once put faith in him?

....

So venerable is this personage known as Shakyamuni Buddha<sup>13</sup>, the lord of teachings. And yet the blessings to be obtained by honoring him not for an hour or two, not for a day or

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<sup>10</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 7, p 90

<sup>11</sup> Devadatta – Shakyamuni Buddha's cousin, who was at first a follower of the Buddha, but driven by jealousy became his enemy.

<sup>12</sup> Gautama – Shakyamuni Buddha

<sup>13</sup> Shakyamuni Buddha - Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE – 949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism.

two, but for the entire space of a kalpa--pressing one's palms together, raising one's eyes to the face of the Buddha, bowing one's head, abandoning all other concerns, going about it as though attempting to put out the fire in one's own head, as though thirsty and seeking water, as though hungry and seeking a meal--the blessings to be obtained by incessantly making offerings and paying homage to the Buddha in this way cannot match those to be obtained by praising and making offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra in this latter age, even though it be only one word spoken in jest, the sort of unenthusiastic praise a stepmother might offer to her stepchild.

The blessings to be obtained from the latter act, it is stated, are a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand times greater than those to be obtained by conducting oneself with a believing heart in the three categories of body, mouth and mind, and offering alms to the living body of the Buddha for an entire kalpa. This is what the Great Teacher Miao-lo<sup>14</sup> means when he writes that one will "enjoy good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles."

The ten honorable titles are ten epithets that are applied to the Buddha. Miao-lo is saying that the blessings to be obtained by making offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the latter age are greater than those to be obtained by making offerings to the Buddha of the ten honorable titles. This is one of the twenty ways cited by the Great Teacher Miao-lo in which the Lotus Sutra surpasses all other sutras.

....

The two doctrines outlined above were preached by the Buddha himself, and yet they may be difficult to believe. How, you may ask, could one possibly acquire greater blessings by making offerings to an ordinary person than by making offerings to a Buddha?

And yet if you declare that these doctrines are mere lies, then you call into doubt the golden words spoken by Shakyamuni Buddha himself, you make light of the testimony to their truth given by Taho Buddha<sup>15</sup>, and you disregard the sign manifested by the Buddhas of the ten directions when they extended their tongues. And if you do these things, you will fall into the Avichi hell<sup>16</sup> alive. You will be as nervous and uneasy at heart as a person who tries to ride an unruly horse over a rocky slope.

On the other hand, if you believe these doctrines, you will become a Buddha of perfect enlightenment. How, then, are you to go about nurturing faith in the Lotus Sutra? For if you try to practice the teachings of the sutra without faith, it would be like trying to enter a jeweled mountain without hands [to pick up its treasures], or like trying to make a thousand-mile journey without feet. The answer is simply to examine the proof that is at hand, and thus to take hold of faith that is far off.

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<sup>14</sup> Miao-lo – (711-782) – the 6<sup>th</sup> patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai school in China, known for restoring the school, and clarifying its teachings.

<sup>15</sup> Taho Buddha – Many Treasures Buddha – who makes his appearance in the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra to lend credence to Shakyamuni's teachings in the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>16</sup> Avichi hell – Hell of incessant suffering – the most terrible of the eight hells into which, it is said, those who commit one of the five cardinal sins or slanders the True Law falls.

At present it would appear that the people of Japan put faith in the Law of the Buddha. But in ancient times, before the Buddhist Law was introduced to this country, people knew nothing about either the Buddha or his Law. It was only after the battle between Moriya<sup>17</sup> and Prince Jogu<sup>18</sup> that some persons took faith in Buddhism, though others did not.

The situation was similar in China. After Matanga<sup>19</sup> had introduced Buddhism to China, he held a debate with the Taoists. When the Taoists were defeated in debate, then for the first time there were persons who put their faith in Buddhism, though there were many more who did not.

In China there was a man named Wu-lung who was highly skilled at calligraphy and was often requested to write things for other people. But regardless of where the request came from, he absolutely refused to write out any passages from the Buddhist sutras. When he was on his deathbed, he summoned his son I-lung to his side and said, "You have been born into our family and have inherited talent in the art of calligraphy. Out of filial devotion to me, you must never transcribe the Buddhist sutras. In particular, do not transcribe the Lotus Sutra! Lao Tzu<sup>20</sup>, whom I honor as my teacher, bears the title Honorable One of Heaven. Heaven cannot have two suns in it; and yet, in the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha declares that 'I am the only person [who can rescue and protect others]!' I find such a claim suspicious in the extreme! If you fail to heed my dying words and transcribe any of the Buddhist texts, I will instantly change into an evil spirit and put an end to your life!"

After he said this, his tongue split into eight pieces, his head broke into seven parts, blood spurted from his five sense organs, and his life came to an end. But his son, unable to judge good from bad, was unaware that his father had manifested these evil signs and had fallen into the Avichi hell because he had slandered the Law. Therefore, the son abided by the dying words of his father, never transcribing Buddhist sutras, much less allowing himself to recite such texts.

And so he continued awhile in this manner. The ruler of that time was called Ssu-ma. This ruler, wishing to have some sutra texts transcribed in connection with a Buddhist celebration, inquired as to who was the most skilled calligrapher in all of China, and was informed that it was I-lung. He summoned I-lung and explained his wishes, but I-lung repeatedly refused the work. The ruler, unable to prevail upon him, resigned himself to employing someone else to write out the sutra text, but he was dissatisfied with the results. Summoning I-lung once more, he said, "You inform me that it is out of respect for your father's dying wishes that you refuse to undertake the sutra transcriptions I have requested. Though I hardly regard that as a valid excuse, I will accept it for the time being. I therefore ask only that you write out the title of the sutra."

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<sup>17</sup> Moriya - (Mononobe no Moriya d. 587) he opposed the introduction of Buddhism to Japan was defeated in battle by Prince Shōtoku.

<sup>18</sup> Prince Jogu – (Prince Shōtoku, 574-622) – The second son of the thirty-first emperor of Japan. He was famous for his pursuit of Buddhism and for his application of the spirit of Buddhism to government

<sup>19</sup> Mātanga – Kāshyapa matanga – one of two Indian monks traditionally believed to have introduced Buddhism to China.

<sup>20</sup> Lao Tzu – lived during the Zhou Dynasty in China (1046-256 BCE), founder of Taoism and viewed as a deity in religious Taoism, which believes that the Dao or Tao is the source of all existence.

Three times the ruler issued his command, but I-lung continued to decline. The ruler, his countenance clouded over with anger, said, "All of heaven and earth are within the jurisdiction of the ruler! And if that is so, then your late father, too, is a subject of mine, is he not? You have no right to slight an official undertaking simply because of private reasons! You must transcribe at least the title of the sutra. If you refuse, even though the place may be the site of a Buddhist celebration, I will have you beheaded at once!"

Therefore I-lung transcribed just the title of the sutra. He wrote "*Myōhō-renge-kyō*, Volume One," and so on for each volume, down to Volume Eight.

When evening came, he returned to his home and said to himself with a sigh, "I have violated my father's dying words and, because the ruler's command left me no choice, have transcribed a Buddhist sutra and behaved in an unfilial way. The gods of heaven and the deities of earth must surely be looking upon me with anger and regarding me as an unfilial son!"

So saying, he retired for the night. In that night's dream a brilliant light appeared, shining like the morning sun, and a heavenly being stood in his courtyard, accompanied by countless followers. In the air above the head of the heavenly being there were sixty-four Buddhas. I-lung pressed his palms together and said, "Who may this heavenly being be?"

The being replied, "I am your father, Wu-lung. Because I slandered the Law of the Buddha, my tongue split into eight pieces, blood spurted from my five sense organs, my head broke into seven parts, and I fell into the hell of incessant suffering. The terrible torments I endured at the time of my death were hardly bearable, but the sufferings that followed while I was in the hell of incessant suffering were a hundred, a thousand, a hundred thousand times worse! The pains a person would feel in the human realm if he were to have his fingernails pried off with a dull knife or his head cut off with a saw, if he were forced to walk over live coals or were confined in a cage of thorns, would be as nothing compared to my pains. I longed for some way to tell you of my plight but could think of none. How inexpressible was my regret at the fact that, at the time of my death, I warned you never to transcribe the words of the Buddhist sutras and that I left that as my last instruction! But it was too late for regrets, and no matter how I despised myself for what I had done, or cursed my tongue, it was to no avail.

"Then yesterday morning the single character *myō*, which begins the title of the Lotus Sutra, came flying through the air above the cauldron that is the hell of incessant suffering, and there changed into a golden-hued Shakyamuni Buddha. This Buddha possessed the thirty-two features and his face was like the full moon. He spoke in a loud voice, saying, 'Even those who have destroyed enough good causes to fill the universe, if they hear the Lotus Sutra just once, will never fail to attain enlightenment.'

"Then from this one character *myō* a heavy rain began to fall that extinguished the flames of the hell of incessant suffering. King Emma<sup>21</sup> tipped his crown in a gesture of respect, the

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<sup>21</sup> King Emma – the lord of hell who judges the dead.

wardens of hell put aside their staffs and stood at attention, and all the transgressors in hell looked around in astonishment and asked what had happened.

"Then the character *ho* appeared in the air and underwent the same kind of transformation, followed by the character *ren*, the character *ge*, and the character *kyo*. In this way sixty-four characters appeared and became sixty-four Buddhas. Sixty-four Buddhas appearing in the hell of incessant suffering were like sixty-four suns and moons coming out in the sky. Amrita, or sweet dew, then descended from the sky and fell upon the transgressors.

"The transgressors asked the Buddhas why these wonderful things were happening. The sixty-four Buddhas answered, saying, 'Our golden-hued bodies do not come either from sandalwood or from jeweled mountains. They come from the eight times eight characters, the sixty-four characters that make up the titles of the eight volumes of the Lotus Sutra, which were transcribed by I-lung, the son of Wu-lung, who is here in the hell of incessant suffering. The hand of I-lung is part of the body fathered by Wu-lung, and the characters written by that hand are as though written by Wu-lung himself'

"When the Buddhas had spoken in this way, the transgressors in the hell of incessant suffering said, 'When we were in the *saha* world<sup>22</sup>, we, too, had sons and wives and followers. We have wondered why none of them performed religious acts for our repose, and thought that, perhaps, although they were performing acts of goodness, the effect was too weak to reach us here. We sighed and sighed but to no purpose. One day, two days, one year, two years, half a kalpa<sup>23</sup>, a whole kalpa went by, and then at last we met with a good friend who was able to save us.'

"So all of us have become followers and are about to ascend to the Trayastrimsha heaven<sup>24</sup>. I have come to pay my respects to you before we go." Thus spoke the heavenly king.

In his dream I-lung was filled with joy. After he and his father had parted, he had wondered in what world he would see him again. But now he could see the figure of his father and encounter the Buddhas as well. The sixty-four Buddhas then announced, "We are serving no particular master. You shall be our patron. From today on, we will guard and protect you as though you were our parent. You must continue to be diligent. When your life ends, we will without fail come and lead you to the inner court of the Tushita heaven<sup>25</sup>." Such was the promise they made. I-lung, filled with awe, swore an oath, saying, "From this day forth, I will never transcribe so much as a single character of non-Buddhist scriptures." It

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<sup>22</sup> Saha world – the world of endurance. This mundane world where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>23</sup> Kalpa – an extremely long period of time. There are small, medium and large kalpas. Some say a small kalpa equals 16 million years

<sup>24</sup> Trayastrimsha heaven – the Heaven of the 33 Gods, The second of the six heavens in the world of desire.

<sup>25</sup> Tushita heaven – Heaven of Satisfaction. The fourth of the six heavens in the world of desire.

was similar to the oath taken when Bodhisattva Vasubandhu<sup>26</sup> vowed never again to recite Hinayana<sup>27</sup> sutras, or when Nichiren declared that he would never recite the name of Amida Buddha<sup>28</sup>.

After I-lung awakened from his dream, he reported to the ruler what had happened. The ruler then issued a proclamation, saying, "The Buddhist ceremony that I undertook is hereby completed. You will write a prayer describing the events that have taken place." I-lung did as he was instructed. As a result, people in China and Japan came to take faith in the Lotus Sutra. These events are described in the Chinese work entitled *Hokke denki*, or *The Lotus Sutra and Its Traditions*.

What I have said here pertains to the blessings that derive from transcribing the sutra. For those who carry out one or another of the five practices<sup>29</sup>, the act of transcribing the sutra produces the lowest grade of blessings. How much more immeasurable, then, are the blessings to be won by reading or reciting the sutra.

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Nichiren

April 1275  
Soya Kyōshun



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<sup>26</sup> Vasubandhu – (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century CE) an Indian Buddhist scholar who first studied Hinayana Buddhism, but later became of proponent of Mahayana teachings.

<sup>27</sup> Hinayana – (lesser vehicle) one of the two major branches of Buddhism in which adherent aim to attain the state of Arhat or “worthy one”. It is the Buddhism of southeast Asia – Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos.

<sup>28</sup> Amida Buddha – Infinite Life Buddha – The Buddha of the Pure Land sect.

<sup>29</sup> Five practices – of the Lotus Sutra are: 1) embracing, 2) reading, 3) reciting, 4) expounding, 5) copying