

THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SUMMER

2009

GOKUYO & CONTRIBUTIONS

Reverend Raido Hirota
Mt. Holly, New Jersey
June 2008

Believer 1 (B1): What is the difference between *gokuyo* and contributions.

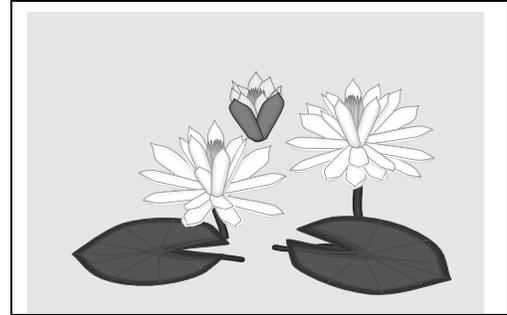
Reverend Hirota (RH): *Gokuyo* is an offering to Gohonzon¹ from which my salary for teaching the teachings of true Buddhism comes. Contributions are for the activities of believers such as newsletters, meetings, etc. Believers cannot touch *gokuyo*. The priest is the keeper of the temple and the teachings. Therefore, the government permits the priest to receive a salary from offerings made to the temple. The offerings are also used to run the temple.

B1: If we were to contribute to you for your temple, then couldn't you contribute that money back towards running the organization in America? Is that right?

RH: It has to be kept separate. *Gokuyo* is used for conducting ceremonies, for upkeep, repairs and replacements at the temple and for the priest's salary.

B1: That's understood. So there has to be an understanding that we have to contribute to the organizational activities.

RH: If a non-believer visits me in Japan and gives me a souvenir, I cannot accept it. But the non-believer can



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¹ Gohonzon – the scroll that is the mandala or object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and represents the Law of Namu-myoho-enge-kyo.

give a souvenir to my wife and children. I cannot accept an offering of money from non-believers either. If a non-believer gave me a gift of fruit, I could not offer it to Gohonzon, but I could eat it.

ON THE BUDDHA NATURE AND BEING SAVED

Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, New Jersey

June 2008

QUESTION: Daishonin² says, on one hand, “All living beings are the entity of Myohorenge-kyo”,³ but on the other hand, “Only those who believe in the Lotus Sutra,⁴ which is the true teaching, are the entity of Myohorenge-kyo.” In reality, all things are the entity of the Mystic Law,⁵ but only people who practice it can realize it. Is that the difference? Please explain.

RH: The Lotus Sutra teaches that all life has the Buddha nature and that the Buddha nature is in all life. But human beings must accept that they have Buddha nature within them, and must believe it and practice it. If you have a treasure but don't use it, that's foolish. You can't enter your house if you lose the key. You have Buddha nature, but if you don't know it and don't believe it, it's the same as not having it. It is very important that you have faith, practice, study and do shakubuku.⁶ The World of Humanity⁷ is not the only world that has the Buddha nature, the other nine Worlds⁸ also have the life of Buddha and can become enlightened when they form a relationship with Namu-myohorenge-kyo. This is explained in the gosho⁹ “The Enlightenment of Plants.”

B2: Doesn't it all come down to establishing a relationship with Namu-myohorenge-kyo? We all have Buddha nature, but without that relationship we don't open it up.

B3: The “24 Character Lotus Sutra” says that all people are following the path of the Bodhisattva¹⁰ and are sure to attain Buddhahood. It is said elsewhere that there is this Buddha nature. But it is strange to think that because we are always working on our practice and have to exert ourselves in practice, we have to do our practice, we have to have belief, and we have to shakubuku because we have to physically bring it out. So I am confused by the statement in the “24 Character Lotus Sutra.”

² Daishonin – lit. great teacher, indicating the Buddha. It refers to Nichiren Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of Namu-myohorenge-kyo deep within the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can realize enlightenment.

³ Myohorenge-kyo – the Mystic Law or Namu-myohorenge-kyo.

⁴ Lotus Sutra - the highest teaching taught by Shakyamuni, taught in the last eight years of his life. It reveals that all life has Buddha nature, and that the life of Buddha is eternal.

⁵ Mystic Law – the ultimate Law of life and the universe. The Law of Namu-myohorenge-kyo.

⁶ Shakubuku – propagating true Buddhism by refuting erroneous teachings.

⁷ World of Humanity – 5th of the Ten Worlds, also known as Tranquility or Calm. A world where one uses reason to control his instinctive desires and acts humanely.

⁸ Other Nine Worlds –the states of Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Heaven (Rapture), Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, Buddha.

⁹ Gosho – the sacred writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

¹⁰ Bodhisattva – one who aspires to Buddhahood.

B4: What is the “24 Character Lotus Sutra”?

B2: Bodhisattva Jofukyo’s¹¹ 24 character declaration: “I respect you deeply. I do not despise you, or look down on you with contempt, because everyone has the potential to become a Buddha...,” which means Buddhahood is already there, you don’t have to do anything. This is what many people say, “We have it already, so why do we have to chant?”

B3: In the Lotus Sutra it says, “Everyone is on the path of Bodhisattva and is sure to attain Buddhahood.” This is just one example that it’s predetermined. So it is always misunderstood by people.

RH: In the Lotus Sutra, before Bodhisattva Jofukyo made his statement, he says if you don’t believe you cannot be saved. You have to believe in the Lotus Sutra in order to be saved. At the beginning of the Fukyo chapter¹², before Bodhisattva Jofukyo states his 24 characters it says, “Anyone [who keeps this sutra] will be able to have his eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind purified...” In other words, if you believe in the Lotus Sutra, you will be saved. Before the Lotus Sutra was preached, no one could become enlightened. After Bodhisattva Jofukyo’s statement the teaching changed. As explained in the goshō “The Enlightenment of Plants”, one does not even have to believe to be saved. All one needs to do is to encounter or establish a relationship or connection to the true teaching to be saved. So what is taught before Bodhisattva Jofukyo’s statement is completely different from what the statement implies and the subsequent teachings. That is to say, before Bodhisattva Jofukyo one had to believe, but after the Fukyo chapter was taught even someone who rebels against or opposes the teaching will, upon hearing it, still be saved. The people who attacked Bodhisattva Jofukyo with rocks and tiles, and staves and stones, were saved, even though they went to hell...they were still saved. Even if they were punished, in the end they were saved.

People may think, so what if I bully him; in the end I’m going to be saved. What difference does it make if I’m good or bad if I’m going to be saved? Why should I practice if I will be saved anyway? Some people are very obedient, while others are very disobedient. Because I have been practicing true Buddhism for a long time, I have become obedient. But the Japanese people on the whole are a disobedient people.

I have been a priest for a long time, which qualifies me to explain the Daishonin’s teachings a little. I understand how important the Law of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo is, but I cannot explain the refreshing feeling I have after chanting. No matter how often I experience it, I cannot explain it to you. You must experience it yourself. You cannot explain how you feel to others. This is the difference between understanding and belief. I think there are many people who understand but cannot believe.

When I was young and was just embarking on my studies to become a priest, I hated to do gongyo.¹³ Even so, I felt good after I did it. Every time I wanted to quit gongyo, but I didn’t, and I went on to complete it, and always felt good afterwards. I repeated this experience again and again. That behavior is human. It is also the manifestation of a true practitioner. To become a true practitioner is to have belief and to feel good after having struggled with yourself. We call this the original self—

¹¹ Bodhisattva Jofukyo – (Fukyo) – a bodhisattva described in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra who revered all people for their inherent Buddha nature.

¹² Fukyo chapter – Chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra.

¹³ Gongyo – the practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, which includes the morning and evening recitation of the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra and the chanting of the daimoku, namu-myoho-rence-kyo.

the life at the inner most depths of one's heart. Anybody can feel the Buddha's life. It is very difficult to have an attitude of obedience throughout one's entire life.

Before Bodhisattva Jofukyo's 24-character statement, it was understood that if one were obedient the practice would proceed smoothly, and in the end one would be transported serenely to enlightenment. The obedient posture is to eliminate the life of the Ten Worlds in order to become enlightened. The disobedient posture is to become enlightened with the Ten Worlds.

B3: I have a question about Buddha nature. I don't understand why Shakyamuni¹⁴ in the Hoben chapter¹⁵ dismisses the 5,000 priests and nuns in the assembly who just got up and left. Can you explain it?

RH: These 5,000 people had been listening for many years to Shakyamuni preach first the Hinayana¹⁶ teachings, then the pre-Lotus Sutra Mahayana¹⁷ teachings. So they thought they had learned everything there was to learn. These were conceited, self-righteous, arrogant people who thought that after hearing the initial teachings of the Lotus Sutra they were wiser and more knowledgeable than Shakyamuni himself. Shakyamuni said, to paraphrase, until now we have been wasting time, but now I will teach the true teachings. Sharihotsu¹⁸ asked the Buddha, "Are you not going to stop them?" Shakyamuni responded, "No." After the arrogant people left, Shakyamuni commenced teaching, for the first time, the teaching he had not taught before. Moreover, having left the assembly, the 5,000 arrogant priests and nuns had made a connection with the Lotus Sutra. Some people go through their entire life without ever encountering the Lotus Sutra. But the 5,000, despite their disobedience, had a brief encounter and thus were saved.

B2: I had a conversation with a professor of the Calvary Chapel Bible College. He told me that man is basically evil. The only way that man can become good is if Jesus enters into him. I told him that Buddhism was the complete opposite. I explained that Buddhism views all things as having Buddha nature. The Buddha nature is inherent in everything. Thus man is basically good.

B4: Even weeds and trees?

B2: Yes. But because I was ushered out of the building quickly, I didn't get to tell him what the Buddha nature was. I didn't have a chance to say Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. So I was wondering, if just with that tangential encounter with the Law, there was some connection made by that professor?

RH: Whether deaf, dumb or blind, an encounter can be made. That is, as long as you have the belief in your heart and you try to convey it to another, then the other person will be touched by it. Contact will have been made. If a skywriter writes Namu-myoho-renge-kyo in the air, that's just in the sky. But because you study Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and understand it and have it in your heart, that is what counts. That is what touched him. Everyone has a conceited heart. But you have to overcome that.

¹⁴ Shakyamuni – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 B.C.E.-949 B.C.E.), the historical founder of Buddhism.

¹⁵ Hoben chapter – (Tactfulness or Expedient Means) chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra.

¹⁶ Hinayana – lesser vehicle. The stream of Buddhism mainly concerned with salvation for oneself, monastic life, upholding the precepts and adhering to the doctrine taught in the first 14 years of Shakyamuni's preaching life: the twelve-linked chain of causation and the four noble truths.

¹⁷ Mahayana – great vehicle. The stream of Buddhism concerned with the bodhisattva way which leads all living things to salvation.

¹⁸ Sharihotsu – (Skt. Shaiputra) – one of Shakyamuni's 10 major disciples, renown for being foremost in knowledge.

B1: So when you describe the Law to somebody, but you haven't actually said Namu-myohorenge-kyo, it still touches the person so they create a relationship with the Law. Is that your answer?

RH: The most important thing is that what you tell the person about the Lotus Sutra comes from your heart.

CULTIVATING CORRECT FAITH

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June 2008

QUESTION: Should one feed or foster judgment or envy in people?

B2: When someone who wants to practice the correct teaching is surrounded by Soka Gakkai¹⁹ and Taisekiji²⁰ members who compete with each other and criticize each other, what does one do? How does the Shoshin-kai²¹ view this? How does someone who is isolated determine the correct teaching?

B3: To me that was the most compelling thing about joining this group. Even though you may point something out, you really have to consider the other person. You're not browbeating them to take faith. You're not pushing them to take faith. You're not threatening them negative things for them to take faith. You're just telling them. You always have to take consideration of the other person when you tell them about the practice.

B2: The correct practice of Nichiren Daishonin's true Buddhism is the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyo. You respect the Buddha in other people. You don't foster judgment or envy.

RH: As you know, there are the treasures of the storehouse, the treasures of the body and the treasure of the heart. For some people, money, jewels, property are the most valuable things. These are the treasures of the storehouse. For other people health or good looks are the most important things. These would be the treasures of the body. But Daishonin teaches that the most valuable treasure is faith. This is the treasure of the heart. This is what I also teach.

Some religions or beliefs focus on accumulating great wealth, or achieving higher and higher levels of education or status. These are the treasures of the storehouse. The Soka Gakkai is just one such religion that focuses on the storehouse. It focuses on bettering yourself. By contrast, Nichiren Daishonin's religion is a religion of the heart. It teaches how to open the heart.

¹⁹ Soka Gakkai – SGI – a secular organization that misuses the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in its own philosophy.

²⁰ Taisekiji – the Head Temple of Nichiren Shoshu. The organization of priests and believers associated with the Head Temple.

²¹ Shoshin-kai – the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.



To be uncertain is an aspect of human nature. Nonetheless, you have to have strong faith. You have to decide whether you are practicing the religion of the storehouse or the religion of the heart. Don't be swayed by what others are doing and saying around you. You must have strong faith. For example, while everyone in Japan drives expensive luxury cars, I drive a clunker. But I have no worries about someone stealing my car. All that matters to me is that my car is running smoothly. This is my way of life. My mode of transportation is not for showing off. If you view things in the wrong way, your faith can become shaky.

B3: The Gakkai always uses the term benefit, relating to the storehouse. I think you do get benefit from chanting, but because of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, sometimes things that can be seen as being good could actually be a detriment and not a benefit. And things that are seen as bad can actually be a great part of your development. The Gakkai makes it into a material aspect. But when you look at it that way, it is not profound. It takes the profundity out of Buddhism. Because of *esho funi*,²² when you chant other things are affected. Can you comment?

RH: As a follower of Nichiren Daishonin, you should not pray for wealth. A roof, clothing and food – the basic necessities are what you need to have peace of mind and to practice Buddhism. Don't ask for too much wealth. Praying for wealth is not the impulse of a real religion. Excess – too much money, too much food, etc. – destroys you. Having too much money causes one to worry about losing it. Eating too much destroys one's health. Arrogance and haughtiness that comes with wealth are also not characteristic of a real religion.

B2: Somehow in our religion you don't see that kind of humility. It is rare, even though this is taught. You are the first teacher to emphasize this. In our religion you don't see that kind of humility, that kind of humbleness. Perhaps our behavior is the residual effects of our Gakkai days. Most people still want things and chant for things. Can you comment?

RH: Soka Gakkai taught people to chant and chant and chant for more benefits.

B2: How does one develop a desire to be humble?

RH: Reciting the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyo everyday after *gongyo*. "I respect everyone deeply. I do not despise anyone, or look down on anyone with contempt. Because everyone has the capacity to become a Buddha someday, if they believe in Namu-myoho-rence-kyo and practice." This will remind you that you respect everyone, that you do not take anyone lightly, and that you are not conceited. This is how you walk the Buddha's Way. The Soka Gakkai is far removed from this belief.

B2: In our religion believers are also way off from this belief because so many of us have come from the Soka Gakkai. That's our background. During the 20th century the Soka Gakkai was the

²² Esho funi – oneness of life and its environment. e=*eho*-the objective world or environment. *Sho*=*sho*sho- the subjective self. *Funi*= an abbreviation meaning two independent phenomena, but one in their basic essence.

primary influence in the religion. They broadly propagated the religion. They broadly spread the wrong teachings and the wrong attitude. They initiated a materialistic secular approach to Buddhism., which does not at all reflect the spirit of true Buddhism. The true spirit of Buddhism is lacking.

RH: It took less than 60 years for the Soka Gakkai's philosophy to evolve in a way that is so different from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, and for the Gakkai's influence to become pervasive. Immediately following World War II it was easy to brainwash the population. When the people were told if they chanted they would get benefits, they were eager to believe. That was the quickest way to increase membership.

Once you are born, you will experience the four sufferings: birth, aging, sickness and death. How you live between birth and death is up to you. You cannot live on a pile of lies thinking that you are going to become rich and live forever.

B3: Why did Nichiren Shoshu allow the Gakkai to happen? What is their responsibility in that? Why did Taiseikiji allow the Gakkai to become so big?

RH: Taiseikiji's religious belief was not strong. They were, therefore, easily influenced by the financial benefits of being associated with the Soka Gakkai.

Now is the time to put Daishonin's teachings into practice and to stand strong. When I was a young acolyte I couldn't grasp the importance of these teachings because my teachers were shallow. They did not have strong religious belief. Consequently, they did not impart the true significance of this faith to their pupils. Not until now did I grasp the true spirit and significance of the Daishonin's teachings. What Nichiren Daishonin taught was exactly the same as the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyo. But until now they had forgotten to put it into practice.

Bodhisattva Jogyo²³ is the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Jofukyo. The baton of the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo was passed from Bodhisattva Jofukyo to Nichiren Daishonin. Bodhisattva Jofukyo and Nichiren Daishonin became one. Nichiren Daishonin inherited the Law from Bodhisattva Jofukyo. Bodhisattva Jofukyo did not put the Law into practice, but instead expressed the Law in his 24 characters and left it for us. Nichiren Daishonin came along and established the practice of the 24 characters. That is why it is said that Nichiren Daishonin and Bodhisattva Jofukyo are one.

B3: T'ien-t'ai²⁴ and Dengyo²⁵ did not inherit the Law even though they practiced. Is that right?

RH: First, the Lotus Sutra was taught by Shakyamuni Buddha. You do realize that Bodhisattva Jogyo is not a real person, don't you? Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra was inherited by T'ien-t'ai. Dengyo indirectly inherited Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra from T'ien-t'ai. The Lotus Sutra traveled from India to China to Japan and was taught by four teachers: Shakyamuni, T'ien-t'ai, Dengyo and Nichiren Daishonin; and was propagated during the three time periods of the Former (*Shoho*),²⁶ the Middle (*Zoho*),²⁷ and the Latter Days of the Law (*Mappo*).²⁸

²³ Bodhisattva Jogyo – meaning true self, he is one of the four and leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who first appear in chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra.

²⁴ T'ien-t'ai – (538-597) the founder of the Chinese T'ien-t'ai school of Buddhism, established the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra.

²⁵ Dengyo – (767-822) founder of the Tendai sect of Buddhism in Japan.

²⁶ Former (*Shoho*) – Former Day of the Law – the 1000 year period that immediately followed Shakyamuni's death: 949 B.C.E.-51 C.E.

²⁷ Middle (*Zoho*) – Middle Day of the Law – the second 1000 year period after Shakyamuni's death: 51 CE – 1052.

²⁸ Latter Day of the Law – present time period which began in 1052.

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

RH: Daishonin teaches that there are 69,384 Chinese characters in the Lotus Sutra. Each one of these characters is Buddha. There aren't any characters that are more important than the others. All the characters are the foundation of the Lotus Sutra and exist to express Namu-myoho-enge-kyo. However, there are some important phrases and sentences, but I cannot put them in the order of importance. I will inform you of these as we go along studying Nichiren Daishonin's teachings.

B4: In the past you have given an explanation of some of the terms. For example, on page 28 and 29 of gongyo, *kai ji go nyu* has been very helpful. So I wonder if there are any other terms you'd like to explain.

RH: The Lotus Sutra is composed of several tales that are ordered. But before each storyline are pillars and little bullets. If someone says you can disregard what seems like lesser details, I want you to know that is not so. The true meaning of the sutra lies in every tale and every little bullet that comes between the stories. Everything is important.

Last year we talked about *ichidaiji innen*, which means the "one great reason" for the Buddha to be born in this world. This phrase appears right before *kai ji go nyu*. So *kai ji go nyu* (to open, to show, to reveal and to cause to enter the Way) is the one great reason all Buddhas are born. Just before this point in the sutra five thousand priests and nuns declare they know more than the Buddha and depart from the assembly. After they leave Shakyamuni begins to expound on the important teachings he wanted to impart to the people from the very beginning since his enlightenment. We are those five thousand departed priests and nuns who think that because we practice the Lotus Sutra and chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo we are superior to others and know more than they do. We should just be humble.

There are many statues and artifacts of Buddha in various countries, but despite this no one really knows the true meaning of why there was a Buddha. The only way for anyone to know the true meaning of Buddha is to chant Namu-myoho-enge-kyo.

Returning to the question, the Buddha himself asked, "Why was I born in this world?" The answer is in the Lotus Sutra. It is revealed first in the *Hoben* (2nd) chapter. Before the *Hoben* chapter was taught it was not really apparent why the Buddha was born. *Kai ji go nyu* really means that every life possesses the exact same life as the Buddha. That is the essential meaning. It's difficult to explain the entire sutra. We can discuss it within the context of other questions.

When the Soka Gakkai joined Nichiren Shoshu they requested that gongyo be shortened. The passage containing *kai ji go nyu* was thus eliminated. *Kai ji go nyu* is a part of the *seo-ge*²⁹ which follows the *junyoze*³⁰ (*no ze so, no ze sho...*) in the *Hoben* chapter. I personally feel that if the members of the Soka Gakkai had continued reciting the *seo-ge* section of the *Hoben* chapter, which states the purpose of the Buddha's life, they may not have developed the material attitude of acquiring more money, a better life style, or greater achievements. This attitude may not have developed.

B5: Wasn't the decision to abbreviate gongyo made by the priests at the head temple?

RH: Certainly, it was the priests' responsibility to make that decision.

²⁹ Seo-ge – the extended *Hoben* chapter, beginning with the verse section that follows the *junyoze*.

³⁰ Junyoze –the enumeration of the Ten factors in the *Hoben* chapter: *nyo ze so, nyo ze sho, nyo ze tai*, etc.

B5: How was the practice before the priests decided to shorten gongyo?

RH: There was a time when they did gongyo three times a day, and read five prayers at each gongyo and recited the entire *Hoben* and *Juryo* (16th) chapters. Over time they decided to shorten gongyo. As you know, there are five prayers read in the morning and three in the evening. What I do these days for morning gongyo is: face east and recite the abbreviated *Hoben* chapter and the *jigage* (verse section) of the *Juryo* chapter. Then I face Gohonzon and recite the entire *Hoben* chapter and the entire *Juryo* chapter. Then I chant daimoku. In the evening I recite the entire *Hoben* and *Juryo* chapters once and chant daimoku. I feel that the Soka Gakkai members recite gongyo too, too fast. It is important to take time to do gongyo. I think it should take about 35 minutes just to recite gongyo, and then chant at least 15 minutes of Odaimoku. I chant one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening. The heart of gongyo is Odaimoku. The sutra is the instruction manual, while Odaimoku is the true entity. Usually the Odaimoku is chanted longer than the recitation of the sutra.

B6: You said, if the Soka Gakkai had recited the *seo-ge* they wouldn't have developed the viewpoint that they have about the practice. But none of us, or very few of us, know the actual meaning of that section because it's in an ancient language. Without even knowing the meaning how does reciting that section change one's view?

RH: It is very important to recite the sutra. The first step is to recite it. The second step is to start questioning what these characters mean. If you haven't recited the sutra, these questions wouldn't arise. The greater the faith and the deeper you look into each passage, the importance of reciting it becomes more apparent. Metaphorically, the Buddha giving the world the sutra is like breast feeding a baby. The baby doesn't know that he's receiving nutrients from his mother. But instinctively he drinks the milk. With that milk the baby gets it hormones and grows.

B6: The issue here is if you sit and read it – if I read it in English I understand the content. If I recite it in Sanskrit I don't understand the content. Are you saying you should first read it and understand the content, and then as a prayer you recite it? Because most people who recite it don't know the content. So it's hard to understand how, not knowing what it means, by making sure I do the *seo-ge* something happens. How does that happen? Should I know the content as well as reciting it?

RH: Back to the baby metaphor. When the baby is small he has no idea what is going on. As the baby starts to grow up he begins to realize who his father and mother are, where he's living, what his place is in society. Then he starts asking further questions about why he's living and so forth. He asks not only his parents, but other people as well—teachers, etc. Ten, twenty, thirty years later he starts learning more and more and begins to realize how meaningful his formative years were, and he may even make an effort to understand what actually happened.

The concept of *kai ji go nyu* helps us deepen our faith and develop a deeper sense of purpose. So at the beginning of your practice, that is when you first started to chant, you may have had a different understanding. You may have chanted for special things because you had the wrong teacher guiding you. But as you continued in your practice and developed your faith, you were directed in a more correct direction towards a more proper objective to have for your faith.

QUESTION: Can the Gohonzon be opened autonomously by oneself or does shakubuku open it?

B2: How can someone feel a connection to the Gohonzon. What does it take for an individual to open the mystery of the Gohonzon?

RH: Have you felt lightning strike everyday you practice?

B3: It's even.

B2: People who don't have Gohonzon don't know what to expect. How does one feel one's soul? You have to have a consistent practice. You can't feel anything without a consistent practice. You can't feel any stability in your life without a consistent practice.

RH: When I was a small child I had a hernia. Just before I was to go into surgery my mother took faith in this religion and chanted a lot. At that time I suddenly felt as though I had been struck by lightning and I didn't have to have surgery. It was then and there that I decided I would become a priest. That was the one and only time I had such an experience. Since then nothing special has happened. I had no intention of telling others of my experience and sharing my feelings. Just because I had that one experience doesn't mean I can experience it everyday. To expect that is wrong. A calm and even effect is the most important thing to achieve in practicing a religion. Desiring this, desiring that...want, want, want...that is not the correct practice.

GOSHO SELECTION

Excerpts

LETTER TO HOREN

So venerable is this personage known as Shakyamuni Buddha, 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 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 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, 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 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...

A person who embraces the Juryo chapter of the Lotus Sutra is sustaining the life of the Buddhas. Would any Buddha, then, abandon a person who embraces the very sutra through which that Buddha attained enlightenment? If any Buddha should abandon such a person, it would be as though he were abandoning himself.

Suppose there was a woman who had given birth to three thousand outstanding warriors of the caliber of Tamura or Toshihito. Would one choose to make an enemy of such a woman? To do so would be like handing three thousand generals over to the side of one's opponent, would it not? So, in the same way, anyone who would treat a person who embraces the Jigage of the Lotus Sutra as an enemy would be making an enemy of all the Buddhas of the three existences.

All the characters in which the Lotus Sutra is written represent living Buddhas. But because we have the eyes of common mortals, we see them as characters. It is like the example of the Ganges River. Hungry spirits see the waters of the river as fire; human beings see them as water; and heavenly beings see them as sweet dew. The waters are the same in all cases, but each type of being sees them in a different way, according to the effects of its karma.

As for the characters of the Lotus Sutra, a blind person cannot see them at all. A person with the eyes of a common mortal sees them as black in color. Persons in the two vehicles see them as void. Bodhisattvas see various different colors in them, while a person whose seeds of Buddhahood have reached full maturity sees them as Buddhas. So the sutra states: "If one can uphold this [sutra], he will be upholding the Buddha's body." And T'ien-t'ai says: "This sutra of Myoho-rence-kyo, before which I bow my head, in its single case, with its eight scrolls, twenty-eight chapters, and 69,384 characters, is in each and every one of its characters the true Buddha, who preaches the Law for the benefit of living beings."

In light of all this, we can say that each morning, [when he recites the jigage,] the priest Horen is sending forth golden-hued characters from his mouth. These characters are 510 in number, and each character changes into a sun, and each sun changes into a Shakyamuni Buddha. They emit great beams of light that penetrate the earth and shine upon the three evil paths and the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. They also shine toward the east, west, north and south, and upward, ascending to the realm where there is neither thought nor no thought. They visit the realm where your departed father is dwelling, wherever it may be, and there hold discourse with him.

"Who do you think we are?" they say. "We are the characters of the Jigage of the Lotus Sutra that your son Horen recites each morning. These characters will be your eyes, your ears, your feet, your hands!" Thus do they earnestly converse with him.

And at that time your departed father will say, "Horen is not my son. Rather he is a good friend to me." And he will turn and pay respects in the direction of the saha world. For what you are doing is truly an act of filial devotion.

We speak of embracing the Lotus Sutra. But although there is only one sutra, the manner in which we embrace it may vary from one period to the next. There may be times when a person literally rends his flesh and offers it to his teacher, and in this way attains Buddhahood. Or at other times a person may offer his body as a couch to his teacher, or as so much firewood. At yet other times a person may bear the blows of sticks and staves for the sake of the sutra, or may practice religious austerities or observe various precepts. And there may be times when, even though a person does the things described above, he still does not attain Buddhahood. It depends upon the time and is not something fixed.

Therefore the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai declares that one should use whatever method "accords with the time." And the Great Teacher Chang-an says: "You should let your choices be fitting and never adhere solely to one or the other."

Question: At what times should one offer one's body, and at what times should one observe the precepts?

Answer: A person of wisdom is one who, understanding the time, spreads the teachings of the Lotus Sutra accordingly; this is his most important task. If a person's throat is dry, what he needs is water; he has no use for bows and arrows, weapons and sticks. If a person is naked, he wants a suit of clothes but has no need for water. From one or two examples you can guess the principle that applies in general.

Suppose there is a great demon who is working to spread the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. In such a case one should offer one's own body as alms to the demon; there is no need to offer any other food or clothing.

Or suppose there is an evil ruler who is bent upon destroying the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. In such a case, even at the cost of one's life one must not follow him. And if there should be eminent priests who keep the precepts and practice religious austerities, and who appear to be spreading the teachings of the Lotus Sutra but are, in fact, subverting them, you should perceive the truth of the matter and reprimand them.

The Lotus Sutra says: "We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way." And the Nirvana Sutra states: "It is proper that he [the ruler's envoy] should relate the words of his ruler them, even though it may cost him his life." The Great Teacher Chang-an comments on this: "[He his ruler] without holding though it may cost him his insignificant while the Law one's life in order to propagate the Law."...

