

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

WINTER

2008

## THE BUDDHA'S LIFE, OUR LIFE, THE LIFE OF INSENTIENT BEINGS

With Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, NJ

June 2006

**QUESTION: Did Nichiren Daishonin<sup>1</sup> transcend life and death, or does he continue to go through birth and death as we do?**

**Reverend Raido Hirota (RH):** First of all, we never reappear in this world as the same person. We are never born to the same parents, we never have the same name or the same appearance. I know some people who have said, "I am the reincarnation of Nichiren." I firmly believe they are not the Buddha because Nichiren Daishonin himself firmly believed that he would never reappear as he was. Nevertheless, sometimes I really hope that Nichiren Daishonin would appear again and lead us. It would be so easy if we could recognize a person as the reincarnation of Nichiren Daishonin and just follow him. Instead of looking for someone who is the reincarnation of Nichiren Daishonin, we need to learn from Daishonin how he lived and what he taught us while he was alive. In our daily life we need to truly grasp the spirit that Daishonin had, the teaching that he taught, and practice the Law the way he taught it.

I truly feel it is very dubious if someone teaches you that there is an individual appearing in this world who is the reincarnation of such and such, who

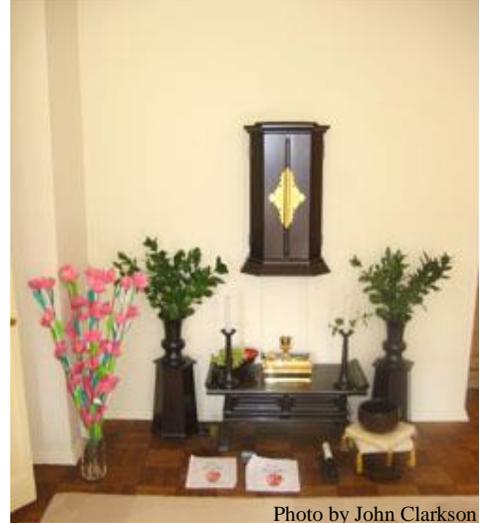


Photo by John Clarkson

The Altar – Oeshiki Day (Oct. 13)

### In This Issue

The Buddha's Life...	1
The Effects of Daimoku...	5
The True Spirit of ... Buddhism	10
Gosho Selection	12

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<sup>1</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.

possesses the highest character and carries on that life's work. If you see such a teaching you should be doubtful. As you know, in Tibetan Buddhism they are always looking for the next Dalai Lama. The priesthood found a young child whom they consider to be the teacher for the next generation. But the Chinese government has intervened in this and claims that another child should be the leader of Tibetan Buddhism. This has caused a great deal of confusion.

**Believer 1 (B1):** I'm not really looking for the reincarnation of Nichiren Daishonin. I just wondered if he went through the life and death cycle. Because he is the true Buddha, is he special in the sense that he reaches the point where he doesn't go through the cycle of life and death that other people go through?

**RH:** From the Buddhist perspective everyone goes through the life cycle. There's no special case. As we spoke about some time ago, from the Buddhist perspective the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind and air are the constituents of all life throughout the universe. When these five elements merge, life manifests. When these elements disassociate life disappears or discontinues. Some people may say, well that's what you say, but what about the effort we've made in this life, is it all in vain? In a sense, these five elements form a package or container and within this package is contained our spirit. Thus these five elements and the spirit contained within creates life. So if you practice Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo<sup>2</sup> each of the five elements that comprise your life is connected to Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. So the constituent elements of your life are different from the constituent elements of someone else's life who practices Christianity or Zen, for example. Theirs would be connected to their respective religious beliefs. But in our case, every constituent element of our lives is associated with the Law. So even when you die and these elements become disassociated, they will still be associated with Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and exist somewhere. None of our efforts are in vain.

**Believer 2 (B2):** If these elements disassociate and disappear somewhere into the universe and never appear again as the same five components, what about karma?

**RH:** There's no such thing as karma. The concept of karma is a way of teaching people so that they don't do the wrong thing, but rather live a moral and ethical life. Even though we speak of karma in Buddhism, from a Buddhist point of view I don't think there is such a thing as karma.

**B3:** Then why is one baby born blind and another baby can see? Is it just bad luck?

**RH:** Here's an analogy: The water in this bottle creates an eco system. The water can be drunk, and the bottle can then be refilled, again and again. But the water in the bottle will never be the same water. With each refill the water has different particles and creates a different eco system. The water will never be exactly the same, and the environment within the bottle will never be exactly the same. Likewise, I feel even though our five elements disappear and reassemble some time in the future, they will never be the exact same elements or components. I don't think that Buddhism teaches that our lives will be the exact same life. The integrity of this life will never appear again in the same way. You can see for instance, by observing a seed of a plant, how the plant has grown in the first generation, how it exists right now, and how it will be in the future. Thus the three existences of past, present and future exist in this small seed. Of course, the past will determine the present, and the present will determine the future. In the same way, our lives contain the past, present and future. But even if we

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<sup>2</sup> Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo – the Mystic Law, the ultimate Law of life and the universe, the Buddha nature within all things.

realize we must have done something wrong in the past, or we may be suffering from actions we made in the past, we can never go back to the past and correct the causes we made, and then return to the present and enjoy our lives. Instead of begrudging or resenting what we did in the past, we need to focus on how we are living from this moment on. I think this is what Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra<sup>3</sup> teaches us: how we can best live in this present life.

**B4:** Then what should our attitude be when we do the fifth prayer<sup>4</sup> when we are praying for the enlightenment of the deceased?

**RH:** First of all, there's a difference between not having rebirth or a recycled life, and praying for the deceased. The Gohonzon<sup>5</sup> represents the assembly on Eagle Peak<sup>6</sup>. That assembly transcends time. It is not about past, present and future. Daishonin mentions in the gosho that after we become enlightened, we will all meet at Eagle Peak and validate the power of the teaching. However, if I say this, you may think that when you die you may be able to see someone who passed away such as your mother, grandmother, grandfather or whomever, and you can enjoy reuniting with them. Actually, I should say that the life assembling at Eagle Peak is free of all physical attributes and characteristics. It's neither young nor old, male nor female, big nor small. It's just life itself. It is just life gathering there without any characteristics possessed when alive. It's just a gathering of spirit with Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. It transcends the life and death of this particular life.

Because we are living in this life with many different people, some of whom are very close to us, we naturally think of them as the individuals they were when they were alive. From a practical sense all we can do is imagine where they are and what and how they are doing. As long as we are thinking of our loved ones, it means in our hearts they are not dead, so we send them daimoku.<sup>7</sup>

**B2:** We chant daimoku for them. Is there some meaning in our daimoku?

**RH:** Would you, for example, chant for your grandmother or grandfather? If you have the name of the deceased person in your mind while chanting, that is the spirit of a memorial service. But from a deeper sense, you are actually performing the true spirit of the last silent prayer of gongyo which reads: *May the impartial benefits of Myoho-rence-kyo spread equally to the farthest reaches of the universe so that I, together with all other existence, may attain the tranquil state of enlightened life.*

This means we are sending Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo to every single being, not just human beings, but to every single element that makes up the universe. From this point of view, although we are attached to certain people, and for that reason we pray for them, in the bigger picture we are actually praying for the entire universe. We are sending Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo out to the whole universe, and that is what our attitude should be.

Thus there is no discrimination among any human being, whether they practice true Buddhism or not. We should never discriminate or judge other people just because we practice and they don't. If you think it's not fair that people or beings you don't know are being saved or influenced by your prayer, then that is wrong. That is not the correct attitude of Nichiren Daishonin's true religion.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> Fifth Prayer – the memorial prayer for the deceased read silently at the end of gongyo.

<sup>5</sup> Gohonzon – The scroll that is the object of worship in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, which represents the Law of Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

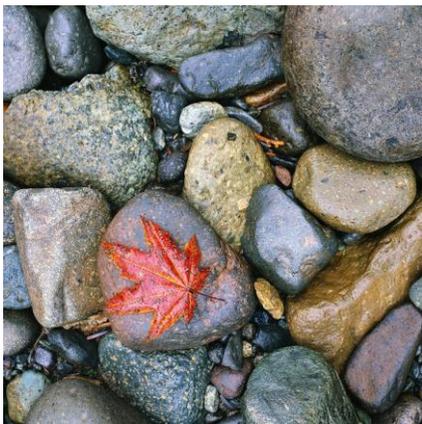
<sup>6</sup> Eagle Peak – or Vulture Peak. A mountain in ancient India where Shakyamuni is said to have taught the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>7</sup> Daimoku – the chant of Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

Daishonin's truest desire is for us to feel that our prayers are reaching out to every single being so that we can create a harmonious universe and environment around us.

**B5:** What is the Buddhist sense of the difference between a person who is sentient and a completely inanimate object such as a stone, a table or something like that? Specifically, the difference between *ichinen sanzen*<sup>8</sup> and, I believe, the concept is “a hundred worlds and a thousand factors”<sup>9</sup>? In the *goshō*<sup>10</sup> the explanation is that *ichinen sanzen* applies to sentient beings, and the hundred worlds and thousand factors applies to insentient beings. What makes us—being conscious and aware of things—what makes us special?

**RH:** Pre-Lotus Sutra teachings focused only on human beings. That's why the concept of *ichinen sanzen* does not exist in pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. So it is only when we come to the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni<sup>11</sup> taught about the Buddha nature in grass or trees. So naturally the life that Shakyamuni



was teaching about included all elements of existence, including stones, chairs, tables...everything. Hence in this Buddhism there is no concept that human life is superior to all other life. *Ichinen sanzen* includes every component of the entire universe. *Ichinen* is the essence of a life form. The Lotus Sutra teaches that that essence is *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*. The clear difference, from the Buddha's point of view, between a human being and a stone, for instance, is that we can chant or pray while a stone cannot. The stone has to wait for the opportunity, or somehow have a chance encounter with *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* – for perhaps someone to chant in close proximity to the stone. On the other hand, human beings can, on their own behalf, actively seek the teachings, learn something they think is worthwhile, and actively

practice and realize more about life by doing so. But that doesn't mean that human life is always better than that of a stone. Buddhism teaches about the meaning of being a human being in this particular lifetime. It teaches that you have an opportunity to explore and learn that there is a teaching that allows you to manifest the powerful spirit that you have within your life.

Think of a piece of paper. The paper can be used as a paper scroll for Gohonzon, as a Christian scripture, or as a Jewish Torah. The paper can be used for many different purposes with no inequity in the quality of the paper itself. The difference lies in the purpose of the paper, how it is used and what it is associated with, or related to. If the true Law of Buddhism is printed on one piece of paper, and teachings of another religion printed on another piece of paper of the same quality, the value of the papers are completely different. The paper itself cannot choose what it is used for.

In one sense, there is no discrimination between the life of a human being and a piece of paper. From the Buddha's point of view, there is no discrimination between the quality of life itself. In terms

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<sup>8</sup> *Ichinen Sanzen* – a single life moment contains three thousand realms of existence, or within a single life moment a single life entity contains all life.

<sup>9</sup> A hundred worlds and a thousand factors – the Ten Worlds are conditions of life from Hell to Buddhahood, and they are mutually inclusive, each contained within the other, which means 10 worlds x 10 worlds = 100 worlds. The thousand factors consist of 10 physical and spiritual aspects that all phenomena possess, they exist within the 100 worlds or conditions of life, which means 10 factors x 100 worlds = 1000 factors.

<sup>10</sup> *Goshō* – the sacred letters of Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>11</sup> Shakyamuni – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 B.C. – 949 B.C.), the historical founder of Buddhism.

of potentiality, with regard to *ichinen sanzen* and the ten worlds,<sup>12</sup> there is no discrimination between a human being, a stone or a piece of paper. The only difference is that a human being can actively affect change in his life. However, some people don't use that opportunity. On the contrary, they move in a direction that makes their life worse.

**B6:** What is the meaning of enlightenment?

**RH:** Enlightenment is the way of life that accords with Nichiren Daishonin's true teaching. Every aspect of our practice is for enlightenment – the realization of Buddhahood. For instance, the concepts of *nimpo ikka* (oneness of the person and the Law) and *shitei funi* (unity of master and disciple) are for one purpose and that is to bring forth our Buddha nature. Everything in this Buddhism is related to our enlightenment.

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**THE EFFECTS OF DAIMOKU  
DEPENDS ON THE APPROACH TO PRACTICE**  
With Reverend Raido Hirota  
Mt. Holly, New Jersey  
June 2006

**QUESTION:** Doesn't the practice of chanting Daimoku to the Gohonzon, reciting the sutra, studying, etc. have a purifying effect? Why doesn't the practice itself lead one to the correct spirit?

**RH:** Daishonin's teaching is the essence of our life. We are ordinary human beings living in the Latter Day<sup>13</sup>, who don't know what to do on our own. We have all the ten worlds, but we can still become enlightened just like the Buddha can. In the end, humans do bad things while doing good things; and do good things while doing bad things. Human beings are full of contradictions. We sometimes realize the Buddha nature in ourselves and sometimes we forget it. We repeat this pattern of realizing and forgetting throughout our lives, but our present personality is different from the personality we had before we started believing in Daishonin's teaching. You do not have the same personality that you had before you started chanting. Please look back and see for yourself.

**B4:** With all the differences in this Buddhism today, do you believe that the process of chanting has a purifying effect and that the process of chanting will lead everyone who is chanting to the same place? But because the positions or beliefs are so different, that would have to change first?

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<sup>12</sup> Ten worlds – ten life conditions manifested by a single entity of life. They are Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

<sup>13</sup> The Latter Day – The Latter Day of the Law (*mappo*) – the current age which began 2000 years after Shakyamuni's death. It is the evil age when only the true Law of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism can enlighten people.

**RH:** First of all, as we discussed earlier, there are clearly two different teachings. One is *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* as a teaching of Shakyamuni. Another is *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* as the teaching that Shakyamuni practiced. In Japan, in fact, *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* is the most popular practice among many Buddhist sects. Nichiren Shoshu<sup>14</sup> is the only sect that recognizes and uses *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* as the Law Shakyamuni practiced and used for his enlightenment and shared with his followers. Thus, there is a clear difference between the way different groups approach and practice *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*.

Once again, I would like to clarify how we should pronounce *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*. There is a slight difference between the writing of the daimoku and the pronunciation of the daimoku. When we pronounce it we should say *Nan-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*. When we write it we should spell it *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*. In the Minobu sect the daimoku is pronounced Na-mu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. In that sect the writing and the pronunciation are the same. And when they chant, they take a break between the “Na-mu” and the rest of daimoku (Na-mu || myoho-rence-kyo). On the other hand, in Nichiren Shoshu the daimoku is continuous without any break, and each syllable is equally measured.

Because in English there is a difference between the written daimoku and the pronounced daimoku, you may want to chant the daimoku the way you see it—“Na-mu.” But in fact, it is traditionally pronounced *Nan-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*.

**B2:** Nichiren Daishonin said in the goshu, first asking the question: Can you gain benefit from chanting the daimoku without knowing the meaning of *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*? And answering: Even if you don’t now the meaning of it, those people who chant *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* get so much more benefit than T’ien-t’ai<sup>15</sup> and Dengyo<sup>16</sup> ever got.

**RH:** First, I would say that \$100 possessed by you, possessed by a thief or possessed by a king is valued the same. Likewise, I would say encountering *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* in anyway is meaningful. You may encounter *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* through Nichiren Shoshu, or through different Buddhist sects. That said, the benefit of your connection to *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* would be different. For instance, there is a clear difference between the hundred dollar bill possessed by a thief and one possessed by a person who, having endeavored to work hard eventually completed the hard work and received one hundred dollars. Daishonin clearly states that *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* chanted by an enlightened person or an ordinary human being is in no way different. As you can imagine, your practice would be very different if you just chanted because you wanted something or because you were familiar with the sound, as compared to making an effort to live your life according to the spirit of *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo*.

What do you think is the meaning of *Namu*?

**B3:** I think it means to return to your true life. *Namu* means to go into or go back to your true life. It’s a kind of devotion to something. You return to that essential theme.

**B5:** Using your entire being towards making yourself and everything around you better. It’s not just devotion or worship; it’s your entire self devoted to this.

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<sup>14</sup> Nichiren Shoshu – the religion founded by Nichiren Daishonin that believes in the Law of *Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo* as the true Law of Buddhism, and in Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

<sup>15</sup> T’ien-t’ai – (538-597) – the founder of the Chinese T’ien-t’ai school of Buddhism.

<sup>16</sup> Dengyo – (767 – 822) – founder of Tendai sect of Buddhism in Japan.

**RH:** Of course, there are so many different meanings, but I would say it is the dedication of an entire life wholeheartedly being put to use towards something. It's really devoting your life wholeheartedly to the Law of Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. The word "wholeheartedly" is so vague that it's hard to grasp. So I would say it means to equate the value of your life with Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

There are many religions that chant *Namu* as part of their mantra: "Na-mu-Amida-Butsu" or "Na-mu-Dainichi-Nyorai," or "Na-mu-Shakyamuni-Butsu," for example. I would also consider the word "Amen" used in Christianity as being analogous to *Namu*, in the sense that it means devoting your life. If you've noticed, in each of these cases the word is used to indicate devoting your life to a Buddha, a bodhisattva or a god. Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism is the only religion that calls for you to dedicate your life to the Law, not a god or a person.

*Myo* means mystic or mysterious. Inscrutable. But it does not mean mysterious in the sense of "magic." Rather it is so profound and inscrutable that anything, even the smallest particle, or any organism, even the tiniest, can possess the life of Buddha within it. So *Myo* itself is mysterious or mystic.

In the time of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, the understanding of the human condition was that human beings were so lowly and common and the Buddha was elevated, supreme and remote that no human could ever attain the state of life of the Buddha. But when Shakyamuni taught the Lotus Sutra he made a revolutionary change when he revealed that everything already has the innate nature of Buddha, so there is no need to look outside yourself at someone else. That was a huge difference in the teaching. This was such a drastic and revolutionary change in the teachings that it was difficult for people to understand, thus confusion ensued.

That is why Shakyamuni used the analogy of the lotus flower (*rengé*). The lotus plant produces both the seed pod and the blossom at the same time. The blossom contains the seed pod, or the seed pod is a part of the blossom. They exist simultaneously. Thus the lotus flower is used as a metaphor for cause and result existing simultaneously together. This is an excellent analogy to indicate *myoho-rengé* – the wonderful, inscrutable mystic Law of cause and effect. By using this analogy you



can show that cause and effect exists in everyone's life simultaneously. For instance, parents have a child, the child, while still being a child to his parents, has a child, then his child has a child, and so on and so forth. Everyone is a result of something, and everyone is the cause of something in the future. This is not only true for secular matters, Nichiren Daishonin emphasized that the cause and effect of the life of Buddha is also within us – within everything. I feel it is so natural that we devote ourselves to the Law that clearly explains who we are and how we work. Our belief is so natural. I also feel it is very odd to devote oneself to something or someone you don't know, such as a bodhisattva, a prophet, a teacher, a god or whatever. We don't know what they are, or who they are, or what relation they have to us. Devoting one's life to something you do not know, I feel is very odd indeed.

**B4:** If it has a purifying effect shouldn't the daimoku itself result in a unification of all of these problems that we have with these different groups that exist? In other words does it take more than just the daimoku to purify this? It seems as if it does.

**B1:** In particular, how it relates to the other groups. That is, the conflict between the Taisekiji<sup>17</sup> group, the Gakkai<sup>18</sup>, the Shoshin-kai<sup>19</sup>. If we all chant the daimoku of Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, why can't we unite together, overcome our problems and be at peace?

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<sup>17</sup> Taisekiji – the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism and those associated with it.

**B4:** Will that happen because we are all chanting daimoku, which is purifying by nature?

**RH:** That's the question I'd like to know the answer to. I'd like to know why.

It's what I said earlier regarding the \$100. It depends on how you use it. Whether you use it for something good, or for something bad. It matters how you use it. Another analogy would be to pharmaceuticals. Two different doctors may have two different views about a particular medicine. One doctor may say it could kill people, while the other may say it could cure people. Just like snake poison, what matters is how it is used. In our religion the gosho says "Three things are required--a good teacher, a good believer, and a good doctrine—before the prayers can be effective and disasters banished from the land."<sup>20</sup> Daisaku Ikeda<sup>21</sup> said, "I am greater than Nichiren Daishonin." He also tells the Soka Gakkai members that they are the greatest too. Even though they chant daimoku, the basic beliefs that they have are erroneous. Thus the terrible results. The Law that we practice is the same, but how they use it is different, therefore the result is different.

**B7:** A Gakkai member gave me a recently released book (2006) which I threw in the garbage. [I can't now recall the title], but the book is total adulation of "Ikeda-sensei". The book ends with "A Hymn Dedicated to Sensei." It reads, "Because he gave me inspiration, I take this opportunity to say I gave him my heart long ago." To me that kind of adoration should be given to Gohonzon—to the Law. This is on page 210. The writer goes on to describe Gohonzon, and at the end of his description he uses the letters that spell out Gohonzon to say:

*G – I go beyond any barrier*  
*O – open-hearted and with passion*  
*H – holding the banner high*  
*O – O' banner of love*  
*N – never be defeated*  
*Z – zealous I will always be*  
*O – on and on working in the front lines*  
*N – navigating with sensei*

You decide.

**B4:** Can one still do shakubuku in these troubling times, with these three groups all claiming to be Nichiren Shoshu?

**RH:** I shakubuku Taisekiji people. Just keep trying to tell them the truth.

**QUESTION:** There are three major groups of Nichiren Shoshu believers in the New York area: the Shoshin-kai group, the Taiseki-ji group, and the Sokagakkai (SGI) group. Could you please explain how the three groups differ in their approach to true Buddhism. Could you explain what

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<sup>18</sup> Gakkai – Soka Gakkai (SGI) – a lay or secular organization that uses some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in its own philosophy and practice.

<sup>19</sup> Shoshin-kai – Shoshin kakusei undo – True Faith Awakening Movement – Nichiren Shoshu priests who are dedicated to protecting and propagating the true teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>20</sup> "How Those Initially Aspiring to the Way can Attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra," *The Major Writings of Nichiren*, Vol. 6 p. 193

<sup>21</sup> Daisaku Ikeda – president of SGI.

**mistakes, if any, that the Taiseki-ji group and the SGI group are making in their understanding and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism? Please be specific and expansive.**

**RH:** The wrong interpretation leads to the wrong comprehension, the wrong teaching and the wrong practice. Therefore, both Taiseki-ji and Soka Gakkai are wrong. The root of Daishonin's teaching is that the Buddha's life is in all people. Within the life of all human beings is *Namu-myoho-rence-kyo* it is the same for the Buddha. Taiseki-ji asserts that the high priest is Nichiren Daishonin of the present time, or the living Buddha. This is completely wrong from the standpoint of Daishonin's teaching. As time goes along, they change the teaching according to their will and at their convenience. If at present Taiseki-ji's ideas differ from Daishonin's teaching, then clearly you know who's right. You choose. That is why we left Taisekiji.

Soka Gakkai also leads its members to believe that Ikeda himself is the same as Daishonin, and is absolute. They are making the same mistakes as Taiseki-ji.

Daishonin teaches that everyone is an ordinary mortal. The Buddha too was at first an ordinary person. There is no one who is not a common mortal. Please note that this is the premise of this teaching.

To say I am the only Buddha, or you are the only Buddha – this kind of thinking is like the fairytale “The Emperor's New Clothes.” The emperor has no clothes. He is someone who has power and an organization, and who only thinks of himself and not the enlightenment of all others. The *Kosen-rufu* that would be achieved by his organization would be darkness.

**B1:** So in Taisekiji the high priest thinks he's the reincarnation of Nichiren Daishonin, and in the Soka Gakkai Ikeda thinks he is the reincarnation of Nichiren Daishonin. Is that the only mistake these two groups have made?

**RH:** The teaching of Nichiren Daishonin and Shakyamuni is “follow the Law, not the person.” Both Taisekiji and SGI are not teaching this. They, in fact, pursue the opposite. This is the most egregious mistake anyone can make within Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. If you make this mistake at the outset, everything else you do and teach is wrong.

**B3:** It seems so obvious that Ikeda is a dictator and Abe<sup>22</sup> is a dictator, even to someone who doesn't know anything about Buddhism. Do you have any idea why the members can't see that?

**B4:** How can intelligent people believe in such a shallow organization?

**RH:** Everyone in SGI and Taisekiji have knowledge of Ikeda and Nikken. They have heard the news about them as much as we have. Some people have common sense and are awakened, while others can't see. That's why many people still believe in and follow these leaders. For example, for some people it takes a minute to grasp an issue, while for others it can take hours or days. People are all different.

It is not my intent to tell you what the Shoshin-kai teaching is. What I am trying to teach you is what Nichiren Daishonin's religion is, and what Buddhism is. We cannot say that you are wrong because you belong to this or that group, or that we are right because we belong to the Shoshin-kai. Even within the Shoshin-kai there are priests who make mistakes because they are not following the principles of Nichiren Daishonin's true Buddhism, which are the principles of the Shoshin-kai. Instead,

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<sup>22</sup> Abe – Nikken Abe – the previous high priest of Nichiren Shoshu.

they are teaching something other than these principles. The purpose of the Shoshin-kai is to study the true teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, and to tell others about Daishonin's true teachings.

I am hoping that Gakkai members can see that this is different from what the Gakkai teaches. What I say is so different, but I realize that Gakkai members cannot perceive the difference, nor what is wrong with the Gakkai teachings. You must realize there are people who are like that. No matter how much good medicine you give them, they still will not take it or believe it. Each individual is different.

**B3:** For some people it means, if the Gakkai's wrong, my father's wrong, my mother's wrong, my friends are wrong, I've spent 30 years being wrong. They would have to admit all of that. It's very hard to do that.

**RH:** Because everyone is different, it is difficult to do shakubuku. Don't give up.

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## THE TRUE SPIRIT OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM

With Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, New Jersey

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**QUESTION: How should we spread our religion? What is the correct attitude we should have? What is the best or most effective way to approach non-believers?**

**RH:** We will be protected by god or Buddha. Help us recover from illness. Help me to get rich. Help me to have a trouble-free life, etc. No religion should promise such things.

The purpose of Daishonin's religion is to realize that any life has the same value as Buddha's life. You must realize this, live it, believe it, practice it and carry it into action.

There are many religions in the world, but you must believe the religion that teaches that Buddha, god and the life of all people are equal. Don't be fooled by religions that say otherwise. However, in the sutra, even Shakyamuni said *shakubuku* (converting others) is not easy. So of course you will have a difficult time doing *shakubuku*. The most effective way is with your whole heart, wishing for the other's enlightenment, and telling them about the true Law. The purpose of the Soka Gakkai's *shakubuku* effort is to expand the organization. Their *shakubuku* is wrong. They bait people with what most people want, such as being cured of an illness. They say, if you believe in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism you will gain benefit; or you should believe in the true teaching because it has power. They say they will use their power to make the country better, when actually they are making the country the way they want it. The organization appears democratic, and it seems like the majority rules, but in truth, the religious leadership is more like the master/servant relationship. The way they operate is by giving orders and taking orders. Their political system is structured like a sovereignty, and the followers are brainwashed. This kind of system cannot change society. In such a system you cannot spread Daishonin's teachings throughout society because it doesn't teach that one must realize that each individual has the Buddha nature. In other words, in such a society people cannot be independent of the organization.

The words of our practice come from Bodhisattva Jogyo<sup>23</sup>; the practice comes from Bodhisattva Fukyo<sup>24</sup>. From now on I would like you to recite the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Fukyo in English at the end of morning and evening gongyo. This is from chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra.

In the goshō it says that the daimoku we chant comes from these 24 characters. This is the basis of daimoku. This means we have Buddha nature within us. Moreover, everyone and everything also possess Buddha nature. Don't try to understand this with your mind; don't try to intellectualize it. Try to understand it with your heart. The language of these 24 characters is medieval Japanese which modern-day Japanese do not understand either.

• *The 24 characters of Bodhisattva Fukyo* •

我深敬汝等。不敢輕慢。  
所謂者何。汝等皆行菩薩道。當得作佛。

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

No matter how much a person is opposed to you, no matter how many bad things someone has said about you or our belief, it may be very difficult but you must continue to try to shakubuku and teach that within everyone Buddha nature exists. And if you continue to remind the person who opposes

you that he has Buddha nature too, his Buddha nature will come out.

The Soka Gakkai has forgotten about this very fundamental teaching, which is the root of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. As time has passed, the Gakkai has become more and more distant from the original teachings. This is the cause of the schisms within Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. Soka Gakkai veered from the true path. The Soka Gakkai may say that they have done so much for this Buddhism, and because of that it doesn't matter. But it does matter. What they practice and believe is very different from what is embodied in the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Fukyo.

**B4:** Sometimes it seems when I keep telling people—the people closest to me—to do this, do this, do this, I push them further away from me. So I've learned over the years that it doesn't work. We have now become closer because I've backed off. They know this is the basis of my life. But for me to constantly say, chant, chant, chant, created a big gulf between us. What do you say about that?

**RH:** The story of Bodhisattva Fukyo is that no matter how many times he was ridiculed, beaten with sticks or staves, or stoned with rocks Bodhisattva Fukyo continued to say, "I respect you deeply, because you have the Buddha nature within you. I would never despise you." He continued to say this, no matter how many times he was abused.

Daishonin remonstrated with the Kamakura government three times. He said it was his responsibility to let them know that the Lotus Sutra was the highest teaching, and they each had the

<sup>23</sup> Bodhisattva Jogyo – (true self) – he first appears in chapter 15 of the Lotus Sutra, and the true Law was transferred to him by Shakyamuni in chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>24</sup> Bodhisattva Fukyo – Jofukyo – a bodhisattva described in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra, who revered everyone for their innate Buddha nature.

Buddha nature, and therefore they must practice it. But the government didn't listen to Daishonin. Instead, they persecuted him. Three times Daishonin tried bringing the Kamakura government to an understanding of true Buddhism; then he ceased. He explained that it was his responsibility to try to shakubuku them three times, but after three attempts it was their responsibility.

In other religions, including the Soka Gakkai, they tell people if you don't practice our religion or do what we're doing, you're going to go to hell. That is not the way to shakubuku. You must not use scare tactics and teach out of fear. You must explain to others that they have a Buddha nature, as does everything else. And you must also shine your own Buddha nature.

Gakkai members who quit their practice are told to return their Gohonzon. I say that's not necessary. I call someone who has stopped practicing, but holds on to Gohonzon a "sleeping member." That's okay. Perhaps someday they will return to the practice. Sometimes people come to the temple to return Gohonzon. I explain to them what the actual teachings of the faith are and what the basis of faith is. If after we talk they still don't want to continue their practice, I always let them know that if they ever arouse the desire to find their Buddha nature, they are always welcome to come back. Don't just cut them off. Leave them with a way back in.

**B8:** After three times what do you?

**RH:** Don't cut them off. After you told them this is what I do, and explained it to them, then don't make it a chore. Don't force anyone. Step back and allow it to happen—to come about. Eventually, as long as there is a proximity to Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and the faith, things will take their own course. It's not important to get the person to listen to you. The point is for you to listen to what they are saying. That is what is important. Get the other person to talk. Ask them why they don't want to practice. It should not be a one way street with only you talking. If it is a one way street, it should be coming from their side.

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## GOSHO SELECTION

### *Excerpt*

### **“How Those Initially Aspiring to the Way Can Attain Buddhahood Through the Lotus Sutra”<sup>25</sup>**

...Only when one understands all this clearly and has faith in it can the power of the Law be manifested and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas bring benefit to the people. To illustrate, in kindling a fire, three things are needed: a good piece of steel, a good flint and good tinder. The same is true of prayer. Three things are required--a good teacher, a good believer and a good doctrine--before the prayers can be effective and disasters banished from the land.

A "good teacher" is a priest who is innocent of any wrongdoing in secular affairs, who never fawns upon others even in the slightest, who has few desires and is satisfied with little, and who is

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<sup>25</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 6

compassionate, a priest who trusts to the scriptures, reads and upholds the Lotus Sutra and also encourages others to embrace it. Such a priest the Buddha has praised by calling him, among all priests, the finest teacher of the Dharma.<sup>26</sup>

A "good believer" is one who does not depend upon persons of eminence nor despise persons of humble station, who does not rely on the backing of his superiors nor look down on his inferiors, who, not relying upon the opinions of others, upholds the Lotus Sutra among all the various sutras. Such a person the Buddha has called the best of all people.

As for a "good doctrine," the Buddha has told us that this sutra, the Lotus, represents the foremost among all doctrines. Among all the sutras the Buddha "has preached," among those he "now preaches," and among those he "will preach," this sutra is designated as foremost, and therefore it is a "good doctrine."

The scriptural doctrines of the Zen, Shingon and other sects stand in second or third place by comparison, and indeed, the doctrines of the Shingon sect in particular deserve to be put in seventh place! And yet in Japan, these second-rate, third-rate, or even seventh-rate doctrines are used as the basis for prayers and supplications, though any proof of their efficacy has yet to be seen.

This wonderful Law [of the Lotus Sutra], which is foremost and unexcelled, should in fact be the basis of prayers. The Buddha himself has declared that "honestly discarding the provisional teachings, I will expound only the supreme Way," and that "only this one teaching is true." Who, then, could have doubts in the matter?

Question: If ignorant persons should come and ask what path leads to emancipation from the sufferings of birth and death, what teachings of which sutras should one explain for them? What has the Buddha taught concerning this point?

Answer: You should teach them the Lotus Sutra. Thus, for example, the Hosshi chapter<sup>27</sup> says: "If someone should ask you which persons in a future age will be able to attain Buddhahood, you should show him that these very persons in a future age will surely be able to attain Buddhahood." And the Anrakugyo chapter<sup>28</sup> says: "If one should be closely questioned, one should not reply by means of the doctrines of the lesser vehicle, but explain solely by means of the teachings of the great vehicle." The meaning of these passages is that, if someone should ask what kind of persons are capable of attaining Buddhahood, you should reply that persons who embrace the Lotus Sutra are certain to attain Buddhahood. This represents the Buddha's true intention.

Here a question may arise: "People differ widely in their capacity and inclination. Some will want to hear the Nembutsu<sup>29</sup> teachings, while others will want to hear the Lotus Sutra. If one expounds the Lotus Sutra to those who want to hear about the Nembutsu, what benefit will they derive from it? If someone has come and specifically asked to hear about the Nembutsu, should one insist on teaching that person the Lotus Sutra? The true intention of the Buddha was to preach the Law in accordance with people's capacities so that they could gain benefit thereby, was it not?"

If someone should raise objections of this kind, one should explain as follows. As a matter of principle, in the world of the Latter Day of the Law, without considering whether or not it conforms to the capacity of ignorant persons, one should go ahead and teach them the five characters that compose the title of the Lotus Sutra<sup>30</sup> and enable them to embrace it.

As for the reason, when Shakyamuni Buddha spread the Lotus Sutra long ago as a bodhisattva named Fukyo, the laymen and laywomen, the nuns and the monks, all refused to heed his words. On

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<sup>26</sup> Dharma – the Law of ultimate truth.

<sup>27</sup> Hosshi chapter – chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra

<sup>28</sup> Anrakugyo chapter – chapter 14 of the Lotus Sutra

<sup>29</sup> Nembustu – Buddhist sects believing in Amida Buddha, and chanting Namu-Amida-Butsu

<sup>30</sup> The five characters that compose the title of the Lotus Sutra – *Myoho-Renge-Kyo*

the contrary, he was cursed and reviled, beaten and driven away, being subjected to numerous types of persecution. But though he was hated and envied, he did not allow it to daunt him in the slightest, but kept on assertively preaching the Lotus Sutra, and for that reason he appeared in our present world as Shakyamuni Buddha. The persons who had cursed Bodhisattva Fukyo did not find their mouths twisting out of shape, and those who had beaten him likewise suffered no stiffening of their arms. [After death, they fell into hell, but eventually were able to take faith in the Lotus Sutra.]

The Venerable Aryasimha,<sup>31</sup> who inherited Shakyamuni's teachings, was murdered by a Brahman, and the Tripitaka Master Fa-tao<sup>32</sup> was branded on the face and exiled to the region south of the Yangtze River. How much more so, in the Latter Day of the Law, will an insignificant monk who attempts to propagate the Lotus Sutra encounter such difficulties! Indeed, the sutra makes this very clear. Therefore, although the people may not heed it or may say that it does not suit their capacity, one should nevertheless persist in expounding to them the five-character title of the Lotus Sutra, because there is no other way apart from it to attain Buddhahood.

Again, someone might raise objections, saying, "Rather than to insist upon preaching the Lotus Sutra when it does not accord with the people's capacity, and thus cause them to slander it so that they fall into the evil paths, it would be better to preach the Nembutsu, which does suit their capacity, and thus awaken in them the aspiration for enlightenment. If someone not only fails to bring benefit to others but on the contrary causes them to commit slander and fall into hell, he is no votary of the Lotus Sutra but rather a person of false views."

In reply to such objections, one should point out that in the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha states that whatever the people's capacity may be, in the Latter Day of the Law, one should persist in preaching the Lotus Sutra. Ask the questioner how he interprets that injunction. Does he claim that Shakyamuni Buddha, Bodhisattva Fukyo, T'ien-t'ai, Miao-lo<sup>33</sup> and Dengyo are "persons of false views" or non-Buddhists?

Then again, with regard to persons of the two vehicles, who will not fall into the evil paths and have also escaped from rebirth in the threefold world, the Buddha declares that it is better to arouse the mind of a dog or a fox than to have the mentality of the two vehicles. He also warns that it is better to commit the five cardinal sins or the ten evil acts and fall into hell than to have the mind of the two vehicles. Not falling into the evil paths might appear to be a considerable benefit, but the Buddha did not regard this as his true intention. Even if one should fall into hell [as a result of slandering the Lotus Sutra], because one has heard the Lotus Sutra, which enables the attainment of Buddhahood, one has thereby received the seed of Buddhahood and will invariably become a Buddha.

<p style="font-size: 2em; margin: 0;">HAPPY NEW YEAR!</p> 	<p>                       </p>	 <p style="font-size: 1.2em; margin: 0;">OESHIKI GATHERING</p> <p style="font-size: 0.8em; transform: rotate(90deg); position: absolute; right: 0; top: 50%; transform: translateY(-50%);">Photo by Art Shapiro</p>
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<sup>31</sup> Aryasimha – the last of Shakyamuni's 24 successors. He lived in central India during the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>32</sup> Tripitaka Master Fa-tao (1086-1147) – a Buddhist priest who remonstrated with the emperor who was a devout Taoist.

<sup>33</sup> Miao-lo – (711-782) – 6<sup>th</sup> patriarch of T'ien-t'ai Buddhism in China.