

THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

WINTER/SPRING

2022

***. . . THOSE WHO HEAR
EVEN A SINGLE
SENTENCE OR PHRASE
OF THE LOTUS SUTRA
WILL ATTAIN
BUDDHAHOOD
WITHOUT FAIL. . .***

NICHIREN DAISHONIN
The Four Debts of Gratitude
16th Day of the 1st Month,
1262



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The Middle Way

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ON RACE & DISCRIMINATION

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

November 2021

QUESTION: What is the Buddhist explanation of race, and the Buddhist position on racism? Christians explain the difference in races as, “God made people different. And if a person is Chinese (for example) it’s because their parents are Chinese. God made the parents Chinese.” Frederick Douglass, a great American abolitionist and statesman who was born a slave, asked, “Why are some people slaves and some people masters?” A Jew may ask, “why was I born to be hated because of my religion?” Many people believe that a certain race or certain races are superior to other races. This is a huge issue that causes many problems in the U.S. and in most countries around the world.

Reverend Raidō Hirota (RH): Nichiren Daishonin¹ was born in Japan in 1222, during the Kamakura era (1185-1333). Letters written during that era still exist today. Not only letters written by Nichiren Daishonin, but letters from others are still in existence, though the greatest number of extant letters from that period were written by Nichiren Daishonin. His letters were not only about Buddhist doctrine. As background, he wrote about culture, traditions of Japanese society and current events. Therefore, his letters are a great resource for historians to not only study Buddhism, but to also study the time in which Nichiren Daishonin lived. The volume of gosho², or writings by Nichiren Daishonin which I rely upon, has 1,600 pages in very small type, and includes letters and treatises written almost 800 years ago.

When Shakyamuni Buddha³ first taught Buddhism nearly 3000 years ago, the Lotus Sutra⁴ was not his first teaching. In fact, Shakyamuni taught for 50 years, and only taught

¹ 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.

² Gosho – a writing of Nichiren Daishonin.

³ Shakyamuni Buddha - Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029BCE – 949BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism on this earth.

⁴ Lotus Sutra - the highest teaching that 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.

the Lotus Sutra in the last eight years of his life. Sutras taught before the Lotus Sutra were concerned with virtues, decorum, how to live as a human being, what is important for human life and what being human means. These were a part of the doctrine of the early sutras.

Nichiren Daishonin relied on Shakyamuni's early sutras to teach the basics of how to live as a human being. These teachings educated people on how to live morally and virtuously to achieve a harmonious society. This included the teachings of the general law of cause and effect: When you do good things, you will have a positive effect. When you do bad things, you will have a negative effect. Life is eternal. Life is a continuum from the eternal past to the eternal future uninterrupted. Therefore, if you did something negative in a past life, it will manifest as a negative result in a future life. Likewise, if you did something positive in a past life, it will manifest as a positive result in a future existence. Thus, a negative cause committed in a past existence will cause you to suffer in your present life. And, if in the past you acted positively, your present life will reflect that with a positive result. In other words, you would have a good life.

This teaching is easy to understand. Even a child can understand it. It is best summed up in old adages: "If you sow virtue, the harvest will be virtue" (*Kanzenchoaku*). "As you sow, so shall you reap" (*Zeninzenka*). "They that sow wickedness, reap the same" (*Akuinakka*). These adages are true for all lives in all ages.

In the Lotus Sutra, as well as in the writings of Nichiren Daishonin who embraced the Lotus Sutra, there are passages that speak of being born beautiful or ugly, such as "one who deprecates those of handsome appearance will be born ugly."⁵ And quoting the *Ryogon Sutra* Nichiren states, "Both the crow's blackness and the heron's whiteness are actually deep stains of their past karma."⁶ It is also conveyed in Buddhist teachings that the color black has a negative connotation or portrayed in negative terms; and the color white a positive connotation. And in Chapter III of the Lotus Sutra it is stated that bad causes in a previous life can result in contracting leprosy in a future life. Furthermore the sutras state that it is customary to experience discrimination in some way or for some reason if one has made very negative causes in past existences. These examples are reminders that when you make bad causes you will reap bad results. Yes, these statements are written in Buddhist sutras and writings, including in the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin as a reminder to make good causes. Thus, Buddhism is often criticized as being tolerant of or condoning discrimination. And upon hearing this, people may think the teachings are contradictory. But the general law of causality makes clear that everyone's life reflects the causes they

⁵ "Letter from Sado," *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonn* Vol.1, p.40.

⁶ *Ibid*

made in the past, just as the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai⁷ stated: "The ills and pains I suffer at present are due to causes in the past, and the meritorious deeds that I do in my present life will be rewarded in the future."⁸ Nevertheless, the teachings of the Lotus Sutra are beyond this differentiation and beyond discrimination.



The Lotus Sutra addresses the equality of all life. All life is equally subject to the general law of causality. No life is exempt. But more importantly, all life has Buddha-life⁹ equally. No matter if one is black or white, ugly or beautiful, has leprosy or physically challenged, rich or poor, every single life has the exact same Buddha-life. No more. No less. All these conditions and attributes are the realities of life. This means despite and beyond whatever you suffer from, or whatever condition of life you live, or who you are, you will be enlightened just as you are. This is the ultimate teaching of Buddhism.

At the time Nichiren Daishonin lived, his view of the world only consisted of India, China and Japan. He thought the world was flat. He had no knowledge or awareness of North America, South America, Europe or Africa. His was not a global view. He did not know that all kinds of people existed in the world, or that there were so many different ethnicities or skin colors; or that there were so many different languages. Nichiren Daishonin knew none of this. Shakyamuni Buddha was Indian from India and had dark skin, often described as bronze in color. But people, including Nichiren Daishonin, did not know or understand this.

Shakyamuni, through his right direction to a life of virtue. preaching of the Lotus Sutra, he Buddha-nature or Buddha-life that teaching alone, Shakyamuni kind. He also did not accept it in effect does not in any way have Chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra is



Bodhisattva Never Despise is Bodhisattva Jōfukyo¹⁰, who Shakyamuni reveals was he himself in a previous life. Bodhisattva Jōfukyo was a kind and gentle person who did not

teachings, led his followers in the And in the end, with the revealed that everyone has and can become Buddha. With disavows discrimination of any others. His teaching of cause and that meaning. For example, titled *Bodhisattva Never Despise*.

⁷ Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai - 538-597) made a theoretical categorization of Shakyamuni's teachings and founded a Chinese school of Buddhism that recognized the Lotus Sutra as a superior teaching.

⁸ "The Opening of the Eyes (II), *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume Two, p. 197

⁹ Buddha-life = Buddha-nature – Namumyōhōrengekyō.

¹⁰ Bodhisattva Jofukyo -or Bodhisattva Fukyo.

dislike anyone and respected everyone for the Buddha-life that all beings possess. Yet, he was beaten and discriminated against. As chapter 20 explains, this was not because he was an evil person. It was because he had committed evil in a previous existence, and in his current existence the abuse he suffered was a means of expiating his sin.



Komatsubara Persecution
November 11, 1264

Nichiren was ambushed and suffered a sword cut on his forehead and a broken hand..

Upon reflection, Nichiren Daishonin, himself, realized that in the past he had opposed people who had strong faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō¹¹, because at that time he was not a deep thinker, and thus thought belief in the Lotus Sutra was nonsense, and those who had that belief were stupid or foolish. He came to this realization because in his present life, when trying to teach Namumyōhōrengekyō to save the lives of all people he was confronted with hostility, resentment and anger. He understood that because of his own past actions he had to accept the retribution for those actions in his present life because he himself had treated others in a similar way.

However, Nichiren Daishonin didn't blame people. He did not tell believers that they had committed bad things in the past. Any life— human or not human— that has lived, lived or lives because they have received the life of others. There is no human being, or life, that has not received the life of others. There have been so many wars on this planet in the past. And although we, living now, were not a part of those wars, we are descendants of all the wars of the past when so many people were killed. We should not think that we had nothing to do with those wars, because when you think about all the connections that continue from the past, there is no one living today that is not related to what happened in the past. That is what Nichiren Daishonin taught based on the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra has 28 chapters. In its early chapters gender discrimination, references of beautiful people and ugly people, and sick people and healthy people are all cited. It states that because someone had the wrong faith, they were born ugly. Discrimination is mentioned as though it is normal or natural behavior. However, in the later chapters it is revealed that all life has Buddha-life. That is the essential or primary teaching of the Lotus Sutra—that all life will be saved by the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. That is the ultimate conclusion of the Lotus Sutra.

At the time the Lotus Sutra was preached in India, which was about 3,000 years ago, there was a strict caste system in place. Shakyamuni did not deny the existence of the caste

¹¹ Namumyōhōrengekyō - the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

system. In fact, he preached from the point of view, or within the milieu of this multi-level caste system.

When we are born, when we receive life, Namumyōhōrengekyō – the Buddha-life – is at our center. But sin is also inside of us, formed by generation after generation of connections, and bonds and ties made long ago. And even though we don't want to discriminate against others, we have discriminated in the past. Everyone has this dichotomy of good and evil within themselves.

The Lotus Sutra states that because you committed bad things in the past, you'll have results that reflect that. As mentioned, leprosy is often stated as a specific example. Leprosy is a clearly visible affliction. Parts of the body, such as the nose, ears, fingers, and disorder of the nerves will occur, and the body will be disfigured. It is easy for others to clearly see that someone is stricken with leprosy. Even in the Lotus Sutra leprosy is mentioned as being the result of having committed bad things in the past.

During Nichiren Daishonin's time the Tendai School¹² was the center of all Buddhism in Japan. Nichiren mentioned that T'ien-t'ai, the Great Teacher and founder of the T'ien-t'ai school of Buddhism in China, which was based on the Lotus Sutra, stated, "Even though people denounce lepers as being punished for committing bad deeds in the past, a person who has leprosy and is a strong believer in the Lotus Sutra is more precious than the head of the T'ien-t'ai sect." Nichiren, himself, declared that a person with leprosy, even though they are discriminated against, is more important than the head of the T'ien-t'ai sect, and the Namumyōhōrengekyō that they chant is much more precious and valuable than the most important priest of the entire Buddhist religion. Nichiren further stated that the faith that one develops to overcome discrimination is very profound and precious. This is the ultimate teaching that Nichiren was trying to convey.

Chapter 12 of the of the Dragon King's dragon princess who she was without changing the story of the dragon conveyed is that animal life, can attain enlightenment.



Lotus Sutra relays the story daughter, an eight-year-old attained Buddhahood just as her dragon form. By telling princess the message or life other than human life,

The teaching of this chapter of the Lotus Sutra was the first teaching ever that contemplated other life besides human life. Until this time, the focus of Buddhism had been on human beings alone. But here in chapter 12 it is revealed through the example of the dragon princess that the life of animals

¹² Tendai School – founded by Dengyo the Great (767-822), it is the Japanese sect based on the teachings of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai of China which revered the Lotus Sutra.

possesses Buddha-life and can become Buddha. That a dragon can become Buddha also indicates that all life can become Buddha. The dragon princess's attainment of Buddhahood further indicates that women, who were previously considered subordinate and incapable of attaining enlightenment, could indeed become Buddha just as they are.

Chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra is titled *Devadatta*. The second message conveyed in this chapter is that evil people can become enlightened. Devadatta was a cousin and disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha. But he was so envious of Shakyamuni because in his youth Shakyamuni had married the woman Devadatta admired, and after renouncing secular life Shakyamuni attained Buddha and established a growing Buddhist sangha¹³. Devadatta, seething with envy, devised plots and attempted to murder Shakyamuni on several occasions. His goal was to take over the sangha and become the Buddha. He felt he, himself, would be a more skillful leader, and develop and expand the religious order far better than Shakyamuni. His intentions were purely evil. And his actions were unsuccessful. At Devadatta's final attempt to kill the Buddha with his poison fingernails a fissure, like a sink hole, opened in the earth just beneath his feet and Devadatta fell to his death. Shakyamuni explained to his disciples that in a past life Devadatta had been his teacher and that in the future he would attain Buddhahood.

We may think that a person like Devadatta does not have a Buddha-mind or Buddha-life. Nonetheless, notwithstanding his evil nature, as a disciple of Shakyamuni he had formed a relationship with Namumyōhōrengekyō, and thus could attain enlightenment. This story conveys that even people who have committed very evil acts have the potential to be Buddha. Devadatta represents this group of people who are such reprobates that there seems to be no hope of redemption due to their evil nature. But even they possess Buddha-nature and thus the possibility of becoming Buddha.

All the lives represented by Devadatta and the dragon princess were the focus of the words of Bodhisattva Jōfukyo in chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra. As mentioned earlier, Bodhisattva Jōfukyo told everyone he encountered that he deeply respected them. He said this to everyone, even those who tried to harm him, discriminate against him, or call him bad names. He kept telling everyone that they had the potential to become Buddha. Devadatta and the dragon princess represent all life. And Bodhisattva Jōfukyo shows us how to behave: treating all life reverentially with the knowledge that all life has Buddha-nature inside and has the potential to become Buddha. This is the primary teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

If we compare the entire collection of teachings or sutras, which is said to be eighty thousand, taught by Shakyamuni to a mountain, at the top or summit of the mountain

¹³ Sangha – Buddhist community of believers, including priests and laity.

would be the absolute essence of the Lotus Sutra, which is the teaching that anybody can become Buddha. And at the foot of the mountain is the teaching that if you did something bad, then something bad will happen to you, and you will suffer and you will be discriminated against. If you only see or hear this latter teaching, then you would think that that is the core teaching of Buddhism. It is not. Viewing Buddhism from the summit of the mountain looking down, you can see all the teachings taught below. None of those teachings are the essential teachings of Buddhism. The earlier teachings – the teachings below the summit of the mountain – are expedients or means of persuasion to cultivate minds. They are not the main teaching. If you cannot accept that the earlier teachings are not the core of Buddhism, and you are stuck on that way of thinking, then you will not be able to look up and see the real essence of the Lotus Sutra, which is that all life – no matter what that life is – can become Buddha. To understand the essence of Buddhism and to understand life you must view Buddhism from the vantage point of the top of the mountain. From there you can oversee all the writings taught below.

THE TEACHING OF NAMUMYOHORENGEKYO IS THAT IT DOESN'T MATTER WHO
OR WHAT YOU ARE. EVERY LIFE QUALIFIES TO BE A BUDDHA.

Question: The teachings at the base of the mountain say that color is karma. In other words, color isn't permanent throughout the eternity of one's existence. It is changeable. Of course, in one's present existence it is permanent, unless someone bleaches or dyes themselves. But black and white are not permanent conditions lifetime after lifetime. It could be that one is punished for negative causes in the past. Or it could be that one is being challenged. That this kind of challenge or impediment is needed to accomplish whatever one has to do in one's lifetime. There are different conditions lifetime after lifetime. So, anyone can be black, white, brown, yellow, red. Lifetime after lifetime one is not going to be the same. I had a discussion with a friend who is Jewish. I told him that in his next lifetime he may not be Jewish. He could be anything. It was shocking to him. It had never occurred to him that he could be something different.

RH: We are born in this era. We are born in our particular countries to our particular parents and with our particular siblings, or no siblings at all. But no one knows how they came to be born in this era, their country, to their parents, with their siblings or no siblings at all, and with their family lineage. No one knows how they got here. Some people may say you got here because of this or that. But that isn't really true. No one can really say how you ended up here, No one can tell you what kind of bad things you did in the past that

caused you to suffer now. You can't fix yourself by going back in time a couple of hundred or thousand years. You cannot fix the past.

It isn't that a black person is not going to be a black person, or a white person not going to be a white person, or Jewish person not going to be a Jewish person. The teaching at the top of the mountain of the Lotus Sutra is that it doesn't matter who or what you are. You, yourself, as you are, will be enlightened as a Buddha by believing in the Law of Lotus Sutra¹⁴. If you are black, you are going to be enlightened. If you are white, you are going to be enlightened. If you are Jewish. you are going to be enlightened. No matter who you are, if you encounter the Law of the Lotus Sutra – Namumyōhōrengekyō – and you practice, you will be enlightened just as you are.

When there are people who are discriminated again, the true Law does not cause them despair. The True Law gives them hope and the courage to feel that they are glad they were born. To give them courage and resolve is the way of the True Teaching.

The people who are discriminating against other people are the bad people of today. The bad people today are not the people who did something bad in a past life. Those who are discriminating are the current bad people. The True Teaching of the Lotus Sutra is to give hope to those who are being discriminated against now. The Teaching of the Lotus Sutra is to save all people.

Even though someone may be born unattractive, the person who calls the other person ugly and discriminates against them is a thousand times uglier than the person being persecuted. Our mind has no color. The mind has no physical attributes. The mind is in the realm of the invisible. When people discriminate based on visible attributes, it is the invisible ugliness of one's mind that is discriminating. That reveals a life of Hell. It is nothing to be proud of.

Question: This subject is the zeitgeist or spirit of the time dominating American daily life. I asked this question as a way to counter the daily barrage of racial discrimination, racial attacks, racial unrest, racial inequities we hear and read about in the news every single day. "Critical Race Theory" (CRT) was purposefully introduced into our society in 2021 without any definition or background, to create havoc and fear in an election year to sway the vote. CRT is a subject taught in Law school to investigate systemic racism in social institutions. It is not taught in primary or secondary schools. And it is not a mechanism for indoctrinating white children. Nonetheless, it has ballooned into and has incited violence at school board meetings, violence in the streets, and greater division in society. People are only seeing, and are being encouraged to only see differences in people and not their sameness. It's become dangerous.

¹⁴ Law of the Lotus Sutra - Namumyōhōrengekyō

Question: I just started training as a probation officer in a county in New York. We train at the police academy. It's been very difficult being in that environment. Some of the training delves into race-based shootings, the killing of unarmed citizens, etc. Even if I try to speak and inform the others that everyone is equal, that we are all interconnected, and that we should live accordingly, I am shouted down and talked over, as if my opinion doesn't matter. The dynamics in this country are very strange. I'm glad this question was asked. This is something I need to figure out. How to work and live in a society that is so divisive. A country that does not have the capacity to allow all of us to live as a collective whole. The spirit of this country is based on "Me being stronger than you. Me being white and you're not. Me being Christian and you're not."

RH: In Buddhism, there is the Nembutsu sect that chants *Namuamidabutsu*. This teaching is based on sutras taught before the Lotus Sutra. Its belief is that Amida Buddha, like God in Christianity, will take care of everything.

During Nichiren Daishonin time, in the Kamakura era, society was based on a caste system. Nichiren Daishonin was born into the lowest caste – the untouchables. Discrimination based on caste was normal. People in the lowest caste didn't have hope. The Nembutsu sect with its belief in an all-powerful and benevolent Amida Buddha, spread rapidly throughout Japan among the untouchable caste. It's teaching promised that even though the lowest people in Japanese society were suffering now, when they die they will be saved and reborn in the Pure Land, where Amida Buddha reigns, and live a peaceful, happy and luxurious life. So many people flocked to Nembutsu. Even today in Japan, the Nembutsu sect has the greatest number of believers due to their promise of a paradise after death.

When you look at the history of the United States you see that Christianity rationalized the enslavement of black people because, even though Blacks had human bodies, because they looked different than white people, enslaving blacks was therefore justified. The Bible states that human beings are the most precious beings because they are closest to God. Animals and plants were created to support human life. This teaching indicates that there is a hierarchy or ranking system in life. Of course, the Christian doctrine supports human life. But the doctrine does not eliminate discrimination. So, even though Christians speak of "freedom" and "equality," "inequality" and the "lack freedom" will spread at the same time.

I think, in this time of the Corona Virus the entire world is panicking, and not in a normal state of mind. People are reacting out of base desires—doing whatever. . . without normal mental filters.

Human beings like to look down on others, just to lift themselves up. For that reason, discrimination won't disappear. That part of human nature is worse than an animal. Even though animals will fight each other, if the other animal is not prey, they won't fight each other until one is dead. While after a human being has fought and killed another human being, they will continue to discriminate and hold hate in their heart. This is the ugliness and weakness that exists in the human mind.

This current world is in the state of panic. Mentally and emotionally the whole world is becoming more and more shallow and more and more depraved and weak.

Of course, Japan as a country has a lot of issues. But we don't feel in physical danger as human beings. That is critically different than how people are feeling in the United States. But I feel the people of Japan are getting mentally exhausted. They have lost their mind to care about others. Many people are trying to push people out of the way, yelling at them, stepping on them or over them, trying to survive. Crime is increasing in Japan, as it is in other parts of the world. There is an instance where a person just wanted to kill somebody because he/she didn't want to die alone. That kind of bizarre crime frequently happens, even in Japan. I would say more and more people have lost their minds. That is the status of the world today.

Nichiren Daishonin made it known publicly that he was born into the "untouchable caste." Priests during his era were from either the aristocratic or the samurai class. When people from the higher classes became priests, people knew the families and deemed those priests as being respectable. It was much easier for them to teach and deliver a message because of their social status. Believers would easily accept their teachings. And when a priest comes from a high-ranking family, they can easily meet with the authorities in the government.

In Japanese, there is a word for becoming a priest which means "leaving the family." But this is really a contradiction because it matters a great deal what family the priest belongs to. Nichiren Daishonin was from the lowest class. His father was a fisherman who killed, or took life, as his livelihood. Receiving money for taking life as a livelihood was considered the lowest of beings. So, when Nichiren Daishonin announced that he was from the lowest class, people thought poorly of him, which was not beneficial for delivering his message of the True Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. The reason he announced that he was from the lowest caste was to show people that even a person of the lowest caste can be saved. And that someone from the lowest class can preach the truth. Nichiren Daishonin boasted about being from the untouchable class to show that even a person like him is saved by the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. And it is not only the lowest class that can be saved, it is all life that can be saved because it is the truth. The truth affects all life the same.

THE SEVEN DISASTERS & SEVEN BLESSINGS

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

October 2021

QUESTION: What are the seven blessings and the seven disasters mentioned in the gosho quote: “The seven disasters will instantly turn into the seven blessings!” This is mentioned in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and other goshos.

Rev. Hirota: The seven disasters are said to be caused by the slander of the True Law¹⁵. The seven disasters are different in each sutra. The seven disasters mentioned in the Lotus Sutra are: **1.** Fire. **2.** Water. **3.** Demons or obstacles to your faith, trying to destroy your faith. **4.** Attacks by swords and staves. This would be a disaster caused by kings or rulers and their laws. In Japan in the past it was possible that when you looked at a person suspiciously you might be killed. **5.** Freedom is taken away- imprisonment. **6.** Attacks by other demons causing unimaginable things to happens like sudden death or illness. And **7.** Being invaded by bandits and being forced into slavery by them.

The seven disasters mentioned in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* is from the *Yakushi sutra*. These disasters are: **1.** Pestilence and epidemics causing many people to die. **2.** Invasion by a foreign country. **3.** Civil war and internal strife; rulers competing with each other. Many people lose their lives as a result of rulers trying to expand their territories. **4.** Extraordinary changes with stars in the heavens. **5.** Solar and lunar eclipses. People could not understand what was happening with the moon's phases and the sun's disappearance each day, as well as the eclipses of the sun and the moon. Because people did not understand what was happening in the sky, which made them fearful, they thought they were doing something wrong. **6.** Disasters of the weather. Too much rain, too much wind. Unstable weather. Because people were farmers, they relied on having stable, predictable weather. Storms and other sudden changes in the weather were disastrous. **7.** Drought. Not having enough water to sustain good crops.

When natural disasters happen, scientists today can explain the cause of these disasters. And we accept their reports. But in the past, people didn't know the causes of these events. Some may say that those people were ignorant or primitive. But I don't think

¹⁵ True Law – Namumyōhōrengyō.

that way. Buddhism explains that the environment and the human mind and human life are connected. Because human life is related to nature, nature will reflect the human mind. People in the past constantly questioned whether they were living correctly. Was there something they were doing that caused the natural disasters? How people thought in the past is a good way to think.

There is no listing of seven blessings, because “the seven blessings” is to not be inflicted with the seven disasters. It’s the same as turning poison into medicine – *hendoku iyaku*. By using the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō with sincere effort you can change the toxins in your life into medicine with your faith.. This is the way of life of a believer.



SET BUDDHAHOOD AS YOUR GOAL

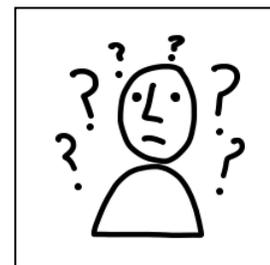
Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

October 2021

QUESTION: What is the purpose of chanting?

Reverend Raidō Hirota (RH): Each believer has a mind to believe or not to believe; a mind that doubts, that wanders, that vacillates; and a mind that is complacent. There are so many different states of mind within one individual’s mind. The important thing is that you objectively reflect and observe the condition and state of your mind, and recognize the condition of your faith, and agree with what you believe. Then you feel, within your mind, the joy of faith. And then,



you must continue to cultivate your mind and connect to the faith that gives you that joy. That is the most important way to live as a believer. You have to observe yourself objectively. It is not for others to tell you how you are doing. You must, on your own, become a believer of this kind, developing a faith of this kind. Become a person who sets Buddhahood as their goal. That is the most important thing that you can do.

The teaching of Nichiren Daishonin states that everybody has the Buddha's life. Everybody is qualified to be Buddha, even murderers. Even if you think someone does not have the Buddha life, that someone most certainly does.

You cannot place a monetary value on one's life. But everyone has a treasure in their life. Not everyone realizes they have this treasure, or that others have this treasure too. If you don't realize you have this treasure, it's as though you don't own a treasure at all. If you don't understand you have a treasure you can't use it. Therefore, the treasure is useless to you. To believe is to understand you have a treasure in your life and to use it. Not to believe indicates that you don't know or don't believe you have a treasure, and you will live and die without ever knowing you have a treasure inside you. That is the difference between becoming a Buddha because you believe, and not becoming a Buddha because you don't believe. Everyone has Buddha life. However, all depends on whether one uses their Buddha life by believing it, or never connecting to their Buddha-life because they don't believe it. The difference is huge.

You should not chant Namumyōhōrengekyō hoping your wishes come true. Instead, you should feel, even if it's only a little bit, that Namumyōhōrengekyō is in your life. You should feel the preciousness of having the treasure of Buddha-life within you. If you are suffering, or sad, even in that condition, just try to feel that within you is the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō. And in doing so, you'll connect to the courage and desire to live. That is the purpose of chanting O'Daimoku¹⁶. You should not chant a million times hoping your wish will come true. That is not the way to chant. You chant Namumyōhōrengekyō to realize that you, yourself, have this life of Namumyōhōrengekyō within. It is not outside you. It is inside. That is how and why you chant the O'Daimoku of Namumyōhōrengekyō.

Question: What would it feel like to connect to Namumyōhōrengekyō as I am chanting?

RH: I can tell you how I feel. But I cannot tell you how you will feel. For example, if I am eating something that tastes good, I can explain how yummy it tastes to me. But you will need to eat it and feel how it tastes to you. I can't explain to you how you feel. I can't say you will experience it in the same way as I do. This is true for everyone.

Question: Are you trying to tell me to quiet my very active mind that has desires, and regrets, sadness and joys running through it all the time, and just let Namumyōhōrengekyō take care of the outcome?

¹⁶ O'Daimoku – Ō = venerable. Daimoku is the title of a sutra; Ōdaimoku is the invocation of the venerable title of the Lotus Sutra or Namumyōhōrengekyō.

RH: Nichiren Daishonin explained what it means to have a consistent and continuous belief in Namumyōhōrengekyō this way: Long ago in Japan there were wealthy families that had a main building where the family lived, and a large outer building that was the storehouse where the family treasures were kept. In those days, Japan was very safe, so the main house was never locked. But the storehouse was always locked because it housed the family's treasures.



Nichiren Daishonin used the metaphor of the storehouse as the place where Namumyōhōrengekyō is kept. Namumyōhōrengekyō is the treasure inside the storehouse. The lock on the door of the storehouse is Namumyōhōrengekyō. The key to unlock the lock is Namumyōhōrengekyō. If you are disconnected from Namumyōhōrengekyō you cannot reach your treasure. The

lock has to be Namumyōhōrengekyō, and the key has to be Namumyōhōrengekyō in order to reach the treasure of Namumyōhōrengekyō. When you use the key of Namumyōhōrengekyō to unlock the lock of Namumyōhōrengekyō and open the door, you will find the treasure of Namumyōhōrengekyō, which is the same as Buddha. In doing so, you will confirm it is there and you will be so grateful and filled with joy because you have experienced and confirmed that Namumyōhōrengekyō is in your life, and that your life is Namumyōhōrengekyō. When this happens, you restore your joy and hope and will to live.

The treasure of Namumyōhōrengekyō is so precious and important that you would not keep it on your hand like a ring. You put it back in the storehouse of your heart and lock it with your key and leave it so that every time you chant O'Daimoku you open the door of the storehouse with the key of Namumyōhōrengekyō and confirm that Namumyōhōrengekyō is still there. That is the life of a believer.

Each person is different, so I can't tell you what is happening inside you, or what should be happening inside you. It is about you believing in the life of Buddha – the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō inside you. I've explained to you and everyone that Gohonzon is a mirror that reflects our life. Of course, Gohonzon is paper. It is that object which is paper that is the physical representation of the Law. This mirror reflects your faith. But the reflection in the mirror is just that a reflection and not your actual self. The real thing is you yourself which you could not see without the mirror. Without a mirror you can't shave or apply makeup. However, you can't touch yourself in the mirror. You just see yourself. You can't say, "Oh, I've been putting on my makeup for 30 or 40 years, by now I know my face and don't need a mirror." But without a mirror, it would probably impossible to apply

makeup well. The mirror of Gohonzon shows us that at the center of our life is the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō. That is what the Gohonzon is teaching you. Gohonzon, acting as a mirror, is reflecting your inner self, and you realize that there is a Buddha-life inside you.

How you feel that the Buddha-life is inside you when you are chanting to Gohonzon and Gohonzon is reflecting your inner life back to you is an individual experience. Each person feels it in a different way. I can't tell you how you will feel.

I RESPECT EVERY DEEPLY. I DO NOT DESPISE ANYONE, NOT EVEN A LITTLE, OR DOWN ON ANYONE WITH CONTEMPT. BECAUSE EVERYONE HAS THE CAPACITY TO BECOME A BUDDHA OF NAMUMYŌHŌRENGEKYŌ, IF THEY BELIEVE IN NAMUMYŌHŌRENGEKYŌ AND PRACTICE.

Bodhisattva Jōfukyo

Question: If people have never heard of Namumyōhōrengekyō, but behave as a bodhisattva, does that mean they will not become a Buddha? Based on the words of Bodhisattva Jōfukyo one would have to believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō and practice.

RH: A bodhisattva is not only seeking enlightenment for themselves through Namumyōhōrengekyō, they are also teaching the Way to enlightenment to others who do not understand the life of Namumyōhōrengekyō. That is the role of a bodhisattva. You may have used the title "bodhisattva" to describe a person, but the real meaning of bodhisattva is not a nice or kind person, or a person of good character. That is a different attitude and demeanor than a bodhisattva. The meaning of bodhisattva is one who endeavors to become enlightened while also helping others to become enlightened too. Without doing this, a person cannot be called a bodhisattva.



KOSEN RUFU

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

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QUESTION: The Buddha said “accomplish worldwide *kosen rufu* and never allow it’s flow to cease.” Since it is impossible that the whole world will take faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō, what did the Buddha mean? And what, in your opinion, would *kosen rufu* look like?

RH: The meaning of *Kosen Rufu* given in the Lotus Sutra is to “spread the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō in the world.” The *kanji* characters for *Kosen Rufu* (広宣流布) mean to roll out over a broad area like a big cloth unfolding and flowing in the world. This is expressing how Namumyōhōrengekyō is delivered. It is flowing as if it is one big piece of cloth. But when I explain it this way, people may misunderstand it to mean that Namumyōhōrengekyō will just spread, and the people of the world will take faith and correctly understand the teaching. There are two types of *Kosen Rufu*: *Jyunen Kofu* and *Gyakunen Kofu*. *Jyunen Kofu* means purity. People will understand the above meaning of *Kosen Rufu* literally. *Gyakunen Kofu* means inverse or reverse. People will oppose, disbelieve and think it is impossible that the whole world will take faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō.

As the questions states it is impossible for the whole world to take faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō. That is true. For hundreds, thousands of years in this world a deluded way of thinking has evolved and become part of the culture and misguided faiths. And the structures of the faiths have become the cultural heritage in countries throughout the world. There are some countries that are governed by religious belief. There societies are built on laws based in their religion. Those laws have endured for centuries and millennia. It is impossible to destroy those societies and their laws, and force their people to believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō. If you force people to believe, it’s no different than a tiger which uses violence to capture and kill its prey.

The group of people who hold the utopian ideal that the whole world will take faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō are not realistic. The organization that sets as their purpose and

goal to make the entire world believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō, is SGI¹⁷. This view of *Kosen Rufu* is *Jyunen Kofu*, the literal or pure view.

The second *Kosen Rufu* is *Gyakunen Kofu*, which means, even if there are people who, upon hear it, oppose, question or are angered by the teachings, if any kind of connection to Namumyōhōrengekyō is made with them, then Namumyōhōrengekyō is being delivered to the world. That connection is like a seed. When you plant the seed, that seed won't die. Though it may not bloom immediately, after a hundred years or so it's blossoms may appear. This is the mindset needed to deliver the message of Namumyōhōrengekyō to the world.



This faith of Namumyōhōrengekyō does not accept the denial or killing of people of different religions. To do so is wrong. Even though people do not believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō, each person, no matter what they believe, has Buddha-life inside them. There should not be any violence or discrimination carried out against people who have a different religion. Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism does not accept violence. It is important to believe with your pure mind.

The entire world will not follow these teachings or way of thinking. There are many people who will oppose it. When you think about it, within each person's mind are certain beliefs. There is also doubt and conflicting ideas. Thus, the only way to connect Namumyōhōrengekyō to the world is through the method of *Gyakunen Kofu*, or reverse relationship.

Question: In the 4th prayer of our liturgy book we are praying for *Kosen Rufu*, but until now we didn't know what we were praying for. So many of us grew up with the Soka Gakkai view of *Kosen Rufu*.

RH: I often use the phrase *issai shujyō byodo jōbutsu*, which means that all living things are equal and have Buddha-life within. Every life is equal. Every life has Buddha-life. This applies to all people in this world. And all life refers to not only human life, but all living things: all creatures as well as plant life. The 4th prayer points to being the bodhisattva mentioned earlier. The bodhisattva not only strives for the salvation of herself or himself, but also endeavors to spread the teaching of the Law that everyone has Buddha-life for the salvation of people everywhere, whether related or not, whether near or far, who know

¹⁷ SGI – Soka Gakkai International – a lay organization that practices its own, distorted interpretation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

nothing about the Law. That is the meaning of *issai shujyō byodo jōbutsu*. Moreover, *issai shujyō byodo jōbutsu* has the same meaning as *Kosen Ruffu*.

It's not only SGI—every religion has the illusion that they are the best. They hold on to the notion that if the entire world believed in their religion, the whole world would be at peace. Or that the world will never be peaceful if people hold different beliefs. But, if the entire world started to believe in one religion, it is certain that some people will deviate from the religion, some will oppose it, some will be skeptical, some complacent or negligent. There will certainly be people like this. And if that happens, perhaps the unfaithful will be punished, put to death, or exiled. It is not possible that all believers of any religion will maintain pure and faithful minds since within each and every human being is a mind that possesses good and evil. A religion that dominates the world will consist of some people whose “good mind” is dominant, and some people whose “bad mind” is dominant. Inevitably, contradictions and chaos would ensue within the religion, and be reflected in the world. People would be forced to believe in the religion through threats and other means, leading to a dispirited, distrustful and oppressed way of thinking.

An example of this, though not religious, is Communism. It is a secular system created to achieve happiness for all. When you look at the former Soviet Union, China, North Korea and other Communist countries people are discriminated against and killed for having their own opinion, or not strictly adhering to or believing in their systems of governing. These secular systems, established to make everybody happy, are controlled by a handful of elites who, in the end, have proven unable to make everybody happy.

It is therefore important that the individual decides on their own to take faith, or to have the freedom to choose their religion without any coercion from others. This is the most important thing.

Question: I wonder about Nichiren Daishonin thinking. How he imagined *Kosen Ruffu* unfolding. Right after Nichiren died, his disciples went in different directions in their way of thinking that was contrary to his teachings. I'm sure, based on his own life experience – the difficulty he had experienced introducing the teachings to the world – he must have realized how difficult it would be for the correct teachings to spread. I can imagine that he did not believe that everyone in the world would believe in his religion. And those who did believe in it, would not believe correctly.

RH: Towards the end of our liturgy is the phrase, *gyo do fu gyo do*. This phrase appears in chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra, and means, *those who walk or walk not in the Way*. Since

this is stated in the Lotus Sutra, it is an accepted fact that there will be people who will believe and people who will not believe.

Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra relays a story about a person who has three roles. First he is a doctor, second he is a father, and third he is a Buddha. As a father, he has many, many children. In his position as a doctor, he has to take a trip and leave his children at home. As a father and a doctor, he warns his children that there was a very potent medication in their home that would be very harmful to them, so they must not under any circumstances touch it. As human nature is what it is, when told not to do something, human beings are tempted to do the opposite. So, the children got a hold of the medication and took it to see what would happen.

The medication was extremely toxic. The toxins spread throughout the bodies of the children and they became deathly ill with many passing out. When the father returned home and found all his children seriously ill, he was overcome with grief. But as the doctor and Buddha he quickly set to developing an antidote to cure his children. That medicine is Namumyōhōrengkyō.

The doctor/Buddha told the children they had to take the medicine of Namumyōhōrengkyō to cure them of their illness of doubtful minds. By taking the medicine they could live correctly, and realize their eternal life. Although the poison had permeated the little bodies of the children, and some were near death, the father did not force the children to take the medication. He just told them this medicine will cure them and save their life and lead them to the right way of life.

If the children don't believe what the father-doctor- Buddha says, and don't take the medicine with their own will, the medicine will not be effective. Even though the children are dying, if the father forces them to drink it, the medication will not work. Since everyone has their own mind, and mostly everyone believes they are right, there are some children who believe the father and take the medicine, and there are others who won't believe the father and will therefore not take the medicine.

This is exactly how it is in society. Some people might take the medication of Namumyōhōrengkyō, and some will not, even if their life or wellbeing were at stake. That is how it is in the world. Some people will believe, some people won't.

A part of our mind believes, and a part of mind may not believe. Understanding that our minds have these contradicting thoughts, and maintaining faith in Namumyōhōrengkyō is important. This too is written in the Lotus Sutra and our liturgy.

Question: We have to eliminate from our minds all the distorted teachings and misinformation we received from the Soka Gakkai and believe what is written in the Lotus

Sutra. That is difficult. Many people hold on to what they hear first, and that becomes the filter through which they view things.

RH: As you know, there is a phrase in Buddhism called *hendoku iyaku*, meaning “changing poison into medicine”; turning a minus into a plus, and demerits into merits. That is the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Nichiren Daishonin said if you trip and fall to the ground, use the ground for support to push yourself up. Without using the ground as your support, you will never be able to stand up. This means, don’t deny what you were taught, or get upset about a failure or a trauma in your life. Use what caused you to fall to rebound – to stand up.

The principle of changing poison into medicine applies to many things. In fact, vaccines are literally made from cultures that are germs. That is what scientists use to protect us. We shouldn’t avoid the poison because there is an important medication inside the toxin. I don’t want you to be upset about what you learned from SGI. Instead, reflect on why the teaching is wrong, and why they interpreted the teachings the way they did. Seek the true meaning and direct your mind in the right direction. If you just switch to a new idea without reflecting on what was wrong with the old idea, the original idea will remain with you as an original trauma for your entire life. There is a saying in Japan, “What you learn at age of 3, stays with you for one hundred years or more.” So, what you should do is not deny it, but face the mistakes and distortions you were taught and believed in, and change them into medication to learn the correct interpretation. I really hope everyone will do this.



Spring is coming, little Buddha.

GOSHO STUDY

*Letter From Sado*¹⁸

This letter is addressed to Toki Jonin. It should also be shown to Shijo Kingo, Tonotsuji Juro¹, Sajiki no Ama² and my other disciples. Send me the names of those killed in the battles at Kyoto and Kamakura. Also, please have those who are coming here bring me the Geten Sho³, volume two of the Hokke Mongu and volume four of the Hokke Gengi, as well as the collected Imperial reports and edicts.

The most dreadful things in the world are the pain of fire, the flashing of swords and the shadow of death. Even horses and cattle fear being killed; no wonder human beings are afraid of death. Even a leper clings to life; no wonder a healthy person struggles to live. The Buddha taught that offering one's little finger for the sutra is more rewarding than covering an entire galaxy with seven kinds of jewels.⁴ Sessen Doji offered his life, and Gyobo Bonji ripped off his own skin to seek the truth of Buddhism. Since nothing is more precious than life itself, those who dedicate their lives to the Buddhist practice are certain to attain Buddhahood. If they are prepared to offer their lives, why should they begrudge any other treasure for the sake of Buddhism? On the other hand, if one is loath to part with his material possessions, how can he possibly give away his life, which is far more valuable?

Society dictates that one should repay a great obligation to another even at the cost of his own life. Many warriors die for their lords, perhaps even more than one would imagine. A man will die to defend his honor; a woman will die for a man. Fish want to survive; they deplore their pond's shallowness and dig holes to hid in, yet tricked by bait, they take the hook. Birds in a tree fear that they are too low and perch in the top branches, yet bewitched by bait, they too are caught in snares. Human beings are equally vulnerable. They give their lives for shallow, worldly matters but rarely for the noble cause of Buddhism. Small wonder they do not attain Buddhahood.

Buddhism should be spread by the method of either shoju or shakubuku, depending upon the age. These are analogous to the two worldly arts of the pen and the sword. The bodhisattvas of old practiced the Law as befitted the times. Sessen Doji offered his own body when told that he would be taught the Law in return. Prince Satta gave his

¹⁸ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. One, p.33

own flesh and blood to carry out his bodhisattva practice. But should one sacrifice his life at a time when it is not required? In an age when there is no paper, one should use his own skin. In an age when there are no pens, one should use his own bones. In an age when society accepts the True Law and honors the precepts while denouncing those who break or ignore them, one should strictly follow them all. In an age when Confucianism or Taoism is used to assail Buddhism, one should risk his life to debate with the emperor, as did the priests Tao-an, Hui-yuan and Fa-tao⁵. In an age when people confuse Hinayana and Mahayana, provisional and true teachings or exoteric and esoteric doctrines, as though unable to distinguish gems from pebbles or cows' milk from asses' milk⁶, one should strictly differentiate between them, following the example of the Great Teachers T'ien-t'ai and Dengyo.

It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong. Our contemporary scholars are just like them. They despise a wise man without power but fear the evil rulers. They are merely servile courtiers. Only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove his real strength. When an evil ruler in consort with heretical priests tries to destroy true Buddhism and banish a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion will surely attain Buddhahood as Nichiren did. I say this not out of arrogance but because I am committed to true Buddhism. An arrogant man will be overcome with fear when he meets a strong enemy, just like the haughty ashura who shrank and hid himself in a lotus flower blossoming in Munetchi Lake when reproached by Taishaku. Even a word or phrase of true Buddhism will lead one to the path of enlightenment, if it suits the times and the capacity of the people. Even though one may study a thousand sutras and ten thousand doctrines, he cannot attain Buddhahood, should those teachings not fit the times and the people's capacity.

Now, twenty-six years since the battle of Hoji⁷, the Kamakura government is again plagued by internal strife. Rebellions⁸ have already broken out twice on the eleventh and the seventeenth day of the second month of this year. Neither non-Buddhists nor the enemies of Buddhism can destroy the Buddha's True Law, but the Buddha's disciples definitely can. As the sutra says, a parasite in the lion's bowels will devour the lion. A man of great fortune cannot be ruined by his enemies but only by those close to him. The current rebellion is what the Yakushi Sutra means by "the disaster of internal strife⁹." The Ninno Sutra states, "When the sage departs, the seven types of calamity will invariably arise." The Konkomyo Sutra states, "The thirty-three heavenly gods become furious because the king permits evil to run rampant." Although Nichiren is not a sage, he is equal to one, for he embraces the Lotus Sutra exactly as the Buddha taught. Furthermore, since he has long understood the ways of the world, all the prophecies he wrote have come true without

exception. Therefore you should not doubt what he has told you concerning your future existence.

Nichiren is the pillar, sun, moon, mirror and eyes of the ruling clan of Kanto¹⁰. On the twelfth day of the ninth month of last year when I was arrested, I boldly declared that if the country should lose Nichiren, the seven disasters would occur without fail. Didn't this prophecy come true just sixty and then one hundred fifty days later? And those battles were only the first signs. What lamenting there will be when the full effect appears. People foolishly wonder why Nichiren is persecuted by the government if he is truly a wise man. Yet it is all just as I expected. King Ajatashatru killed his father and nearly murdered his mother, for which he was hailed by the six royal ministers. When Devadatta killed an arhat and shed the Buddha's blood, Kokalika¹¹ and others were delighted. Nichiren is father and mother to the ruling clan and is like a Buddha or an arhat to this age. The sovereign and his subjects who rejoice at his exile are truly the most shameless of all. Those heretical priests who have been bewailing the exposure of their errors may be overjoyed for the moment, but eventually they will suffer no less than Nichiren and his disciples. Their joy is like Fujiwara Yasuhira's¹² when he killed his brother and Minamoto Yoshitsune. The devil who shall destroy the ruling clan has already entered the country. This is the meaning of the passage from the Lotus Sutra which reads, "The devil enters one's body."¹³

The persecutions Nichiren has faced are the result of karma formed in previous lifetimes. The Fukyo chapter states, "... after expiating his sins," indicating that Bodhisattva Fukyo was vilified and beaten by countless slanderers because of his past karma. So, too, it is with Nichiren, who in this life was born poor and lowly to a chandala¹⁴ family. In my heart I cherish some faith in the Lotus Sutra, but my body, while outwardly human, is fundamentally that of an animal, which once subsisted on fish and fowl and was conceived of the male and female fluids. My spirit dwells in this body like the moon reflected in a muddy pond or gold wrapped in a filthy bag. Since my heart believes in the Lotus Sutra, I do not fear even Bonten or Taishaku, but my body is still that of an animal. With such disparity between my body and my mind, no wonder the foolish despise me. Without doubt, when compared to my body, my mind shines like the moon or gold. Who knows what slander I may have committed in the past? I may possess the soul of Priest Shoi¹⁵ or the spirit of Mahadeva¹⁶. Maybe I am descended from those who contemptuously persecuted Bodhisattva Fukyo or am among those who forgot their original faith¹⁷ in the Lotus Sutra. I may even be related to the five thousand arrogant people¹⁸ who would not remain to hear the sutra, or belong to the third and lowest group of Daito Buddha's disciples. It is impossible to fathom one's karma. Iron, when heated in the flames and pounded, becomes a fine sword. Wise men and saints are tested by abuse. My present exile

is not because of any crime. It is solely so that I may expiate in this lifetime my past heavy slanders and be freed from the three evil paths in the next.

The Hatsunaion Sutra states, "In the coming age, there will be those who enter the priesthood, don surplices and make a show of studying my teachings. However, being neither diligent nor serious about their practice, they will slander the Mahayana sutras. You should be aware that these people are the ones who are following the heretical religions of today." Those who read this passage should reflect deeply on their own practice. The Buddha is saying that those of our contemporary priests who are lazy and remiss were disciples of the six non-Buddhist teachers in Shakyamuni's day. The followers of Honen who call themselves the Nembutsu sect not only turn people away from the Lotus Sutra, telling them to "discard, close, ignore and abandon" it, but advocate chanting only the name of Amida, a Buddha described in the provisional teachings. The followers of Dainichi, known as the Zen sect, claim that the true teachings of Buddhism have been transmitted apart from the sutras. They ridicule the Lotus Sutra as nothing more than a finger pointing to the moon or a meaningless string of words. These priests were certainly followers of the six non-Buddhist teachers, only now they have entered the stream of Buddhism. According to the Nirvana Sutra, the Buddha had enabled everyone to attain enlightenment by teaching the Juryo chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Yet, alas, when he illuminated the hundred and thirty-six hells underground, instead of finding them empty, he saw that the slanderers of Buddhism who were people of incorrigible disbelief were still being confined there by the guards of hell. They proliferated until they became the people of Japan today.

Since Nichiren himself committed slander in the past, he became a Nembutsu priest in this lifetime, and for several years he also laughed at those who practiced the Lotus Sutra, saying, "Not a single person has ever attained Buddhahood through that sutra"¹⁹ or "Not one person in a thousand can reach enlightenment through its teachings."²⁰ Awakening from my slanderous condition, I feel like a drunken son, who, in his stupor, strikes his parents but thinks nothing of it. When he returns to his senses, he regrets it bitterly but to no avail. His offense is extremely difficult to erase. Even more so are past slanders of the Law, which stain the depth of one's heart. A sutra²¹ states that both the crow's blackness and the heron's whiteness are actually the deep stains of their past karma. The Brahmans and other non-Buddhists refused to recognize this causality and claimed it was the work of nature, and today, when I expose people's slanders in an effort to save them, they deny it with every excuse possible and argue back with Honen's words about barring the gates to the Lotus Sutra. From Nembutsu believers this is scarcely surprising, but even the Tendai and Shingon priests actively support them. On the sixteenth and the seventeenth day of the first month of this year, hundreds of priests and believers from the

Nembutsu and other sects came to debate with Nichiren. Representing the Nembutsu, Insho-bo said, "Saint Honen did not instruct us to discard the Lotus Sutra. He simply wrote that everyone should chant the Nembutsu, and its great blessings will assure their ascension to the pure land. Even the Tendai priests of Onjo-ji and Enryaku-ji temples²² exiled to this island praise Saint Honen and say how excellent his teaching is. How do you dare try to refute it?" The local priests are even more ignorant than their counterparts in Kamakura. They are absolutely pitiful.

How terrible are the slanders Nichiren committed in his past and present existences! Since you have been born into this evil country and become the disciple of such a man, there is no telling what you may have to endure. The Hatsunaion Sutra reads, "Men of devout faith, because you committed countless sins and accumulated much evil karma in the past, you must expect to suffer retribution for everything you have done. You may be reviled, cursed with an ugly appearance, be poorly clad and poorly fed, seek wealth in vain, be born to an impoverished or heretical family, or be persecuted by your sovereign." It further states, "It is due to the blessings obtained by protecting the Law that one can diminish in this lifetime his suffering and retribution." Were it not for Nichiren, these passages from the sutra would virtually make the Buddha a liar. For none, save Nichiren have experienced all eight sufferings described in the sutra: (1) to be slighted; (2) to possess an ugly physical form; (3) to lack clothing; (4) to lack food; (5) to seek wealth in vain; (6) to be born to a poor family; (7) to be born to a heretical family; and (8) to be persecuted by one's sovereign. One who climbs a high mountain must eventually descend. One who slights another will in turn be despised. One who deprecates those of handsome appearance will be born ugly. One who robs another of food and clothing is sure to fall into the world of hunger. One who mocks noble men or anyone who observes the precepts will be born to a poor family. One who slanders a family that embraces the True Law will be born to a heretical family. One who laughs at those who cherish the precepts will be born a commoner and meet with persecution from his sovereign. This is the general law of cause and effect.

Nichiren's suffering, however, are not ascribable to this causal law. In the past he despised the votaries of the Lotus Sutra and ridiculed the sutra itself, sometimes with exaggerated praise and other times with contempt. He has met all eight of these terrible sufferings for such acts against the Lotus Sutra which is as magnificent as two jewels combined, two moons shining side by side, two stars conjoined or one Mount Hua²³ placed atop another. Usually these sufferings would torment a person over many lifetimes, appearing one at a time. but Nichiren has denounced the enemies of the Lotus Sutra so severely that all eight descended upon him at once. His situation is like that of a peasant

heavily in debt to his lord and others. As long as he remains on the estate, they are likely to defer his debts from one year to the next, rather than mercilessly hounding him. But as soon as he tries to leave, everyone will rush over and demand that he repay everything at once. Thus the sutra states, "It is due to the blessings obtained by protecting the Law that one can diminish...his suffering and retribution."

The Lotus Sutra reads, "There are many ignorant people who will vilify and attack us, the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, with swords, staves and stone... they will denounce us to the sovereign, ministers, Brahmans and other influential men... we will be banished again and again."²⁴ Without hell's guards to torment them, slanderers could never emerge from hell. Were it not for the authorities who now persecute Nichiren, he could not expiate his past sin of slandering the Law. Nichiren is like Bodhisattva Fukyo who lived in ages past, and the people of this day are like the priests, nuns and lay men and women who disdained and persecuted Fukyo. The people are different, yet the cause is the same. Different people may kill their parents, but they all fall into the same hell of incessant suffering. Since Nichiren is making the same cause as Fukyo, he is certain to become a Buddha equal to Shakyamuni. Moreover, those who now persecute him are like Bhadrakala²⁵ and the others who persecuted Fukyo. They will be tortured in the depths of hell for a thousand aeons. I therefore pity them deeply and wonder what can be done for them. Those who at first disdained and persecuted Fukyo later took faith in his teachings and became his followers. The greater part of their slander was thus expiated, but even the small part which remained caused them to suffer as terribly as one who had killed his parents a thousand times over. The people of this age refuse to repent at all and must therefore suffer for interminable aeons as described in the Hiyu chapter, perhaps even for the duration of sanzen- or gohyaku-jintengo.

There are also those who appeared to believe in Nichiren but began doubting when they saw him persecuted. They have not only forsaken the Lotus Sutra but actually think themselves wise enough to instruct Nichiren. The pitiful thing is that these perverse people must suffer in the depths of hell even longer than the Nembutsu believers. Ashura contended that the Buddha had only eighteen sensory functions but that he himself had nineteen. Brahmans claimed that the Buddha offered only one way to enlightenment but they had ninety-five. In the same way, the renegade disciples say that although Priest Nichiren is their teacher, he is too rigid, and they will spread the Lotus Sutra in a more flexible way. In so asserting, they are being as ridiculous as fireflies laughing at the sun and moon, an anthill belittling Mount Hua, small inlets despising the boundless sea, or a magpie mocking the Chinese phoenix. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

The twentieth day of the third month in the ninth year of Bun'ei
(1272)

There is very little writing paper here in the province of Sado, and to write to you individually would take too long. However, if even one person fails to hear me, it will cause resentment. Therefore, I want all sincere believers to meet and read this letter together for encouragement. When disaster strikes, our personal troubles seem insignificant. I do not know how accurate the reports reaching me are, but there must surely be intense grieving over those killed in the recent battles. What has become of Izawa no Nyudo and Sakabe no Nyudo²⁶? Send me news of Kawanobe, Yamashiro, Tokugyo-ji²⁷ and the others. Also, please be kind enough to send me the Essentials of Government²⁸ in the Chen-kuan Era, the Anthology of Tales²⁹, and the Esoteric Teachings³⁰ of the Eight Sects. Without these, I cannot even write letters.

Mar 20, 1272 Toki Jonin

1 Tonotsuji Juro: A staunch believer who lived in Tonotsuji, Kamakura.

2 Sajiki no Ama: A woman believer in Kamakura.

3 Geten Sho: A collection of non-Buddhist scriptures.

4 Lotus Sutra, chap. 23.

5 Tao-an (314-385), Hui-yuan (523-592) and Fa-tao (1086-1147): Priests who dedicated their lives to propagating Buddhism.

6 Cows' milk and asses' milk: Cows' milk indicates the Lotus Sutra while asses' milk, thought to be poisonous, indicates all other sutras.

7 Battle of Hoji: The battle waged in 1247 between the Hojo and Miura clans for control of the regency. The Hojo clan emerged victorious.

8 Rebellions: They were instigated by Hojo Tokisuke, an influential commissioner in Kyoto, who attempted the overthrow of his half-brother, regent Hojo Tokimune.

9 Disaster of internal strife: One of the three calamities and seven disasters.

10 Kanto: As used here, it denotes the Kamakura government.

11 Kokalika: A clansman of Shakyamuni who entered the priesthood at the command of the Buddha's father, King Shuddhodana. Later he fell under Devadatta's influence and slandered Shakyamuni's close disciples, Shariputra and Maudgalyayana.

12 Fujiwara Yasuhira (1155-1189): The son of Fujiwara Hidehira, lord of the province of Mutsu in northeastern Japan. He killed his brother and usurped power for himself. Minamoto Yoritomo, the Kamakura shogun, ordered him to kill Yoshitsune, Yoritomo's brother, which he did to prove his loyalty. Later, however, Yoritomo had him executed to consolidate his own power in the northern part of Japan.

13 Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

14 Chandala (candala): The lowest class, lower than the caste system, in India, comprised of those whose profession required them to kill living creatures. The Daishonin was born to a family of fishermen.

15 Shoi: He appeared in the Latter Day of a Buddha called Shishionno. He is said to have fallen into hell alive for slandering Bodhisattva Kikon, who propagated Buddhism.

16 Mahadeva: A Brahman born about one hundred years after Shakyamuni. He is said to have committed three of the five cardinal sins, killing his father, mother and an arhat. He repented and joined the priesthood but broke the unity of believers by corrupting orthodox teachings with his own misconceptions.

17 Those who forgot their original faith: Individuals who, because of the slanders they have committed, do not remember that they received the seed of enlightenment from the Buddha in the distant past called gohyaku-jintengo.

18 Five thousand arrogant people: The people (priests, nuns, laymen and laywomen) who thought they had already mastered Buddhism and left the assembly as Shakyamuni began to expound the Lotus Sutra.

19 Anraku-shu, vol. I.

20 Ojo-raisan.

21 Ryogon Sutra.

22 Onjo-ji and Enryaku-ji: Onjo-ji (also called Mii-dera) temple in Kyoto became the headquarters of the Jimon school of the Tendai sect in 993, when Chisho's latter-day disciples left Enryaku-ji temple, situated on Mount Hiei. Enryaku-ji then became the main temple of the Sanmon school of the Tendai sect.

23 Hua: One of the five highest mountains in China.

24 Lotus Sutra, chap. 13.

25 Bhadrapala: One of the central figures in the persecution of Bodhisattva Fukyo. He is said to have suffered in an endless hell.

26 Izawa no Nyudo and Sakabe no Nyudo: Apparently loyal followers of the Daishonin in Kamakura. Little is known about them.

27 Kawanobe, Yamashiro and Tokugyo-ji: Followers of the Daishonin, believed to have been imprisoned in an underground cell following the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.

28 Essentials of Government in the Chen-kuan Era (627-649): (Chin., Chen-kuan Cheng-yao) Written by Wu Ching during the T'ang dynasty in China, it discusses political matters between the emperor and his subjects.

29 Anthology of Tales: A collection of non-Buddhist literature. Little is known about it.

30 Esoteric Teachings of the Eight Sects: The esoteric doctrines of the eight major Buddhist sects in medieval Japan: Kusha, Jijitsu, Ritsu, Hosso, Sanron, Kegon, Shingon and Tendai.