

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

WINTER

2013

## THE FIRST PRAYER

Reverend Raidō Hirota  
International Meeting  
December 2011

**QUESTION:** During the first prayer in the morning what should our attitude be, how should we be praying towards the *shoten zenjin*<sup>1</sup>?

**Rev. Hirota (RH):** When the Lotus Sutra<sup>2</sup> (MyōhōRengeKyō)<sup>3</sup> is recited, all the Buddhist gods (*Shoten Zenjin*) in the whole universe gather around. They swear to heaven that they will protect the area where the unprecedented truth is about to be recited. In other words, wherever the teachings of the Lotus Sutra are taught, the Shoten Zenjin are there to witness it.

Morning Gongyo<sup>4</sup> is the time to present the offering (*Houmi*) of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō<sup>5</sup> to the Buddhist gods (*Houmi*, translated as offering, is a word used to describe the deep taste of Buddhist teachings as food or sustenance). Once you've made the offering of



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### *The Middle Way*

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<sup>1</sup> Shoten Zenjin – Buddhist gods – forces of nature that are not explicable, can't be seen and are not scientifically proven.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> MyōhōRengeKyō – a Chinese translation of Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra made by Kumarajiva in the year 406 (Skt. Title is *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra*).

<sup>4</sup> Gongyo – in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism it is the practice that consists of morning and evening recitation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting NamuMyōhōRengeKyō.

<sup>5</sup> NamuMyōhōRengeKyō – the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

the first prayer, you are prepared to receive the teachings of the Lotus Sutra from the venerable Gohonzon.<sup>6</sup> Even though it's your voice that comes out of your mouth reciting the Sutra and the Daimoku,<sup>7</sup> the voice that enters your ears will reach your heart as Buddha's teachings.

So like the *shoten zenjin*, you also gather here and swear before the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, that you will not forsake your role to protect the practitioners. For if you don't make this vow, you won't be able to receive the offering of the truth of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō. When you receive that offering, serve it by protecting people who are in accord with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. It is in this spirit that you should face East and practice *shoza gongyo*, or the recitation of the first prayer.

Some people may feel lonely when practicing Gongyo by themselves. But even when you do it by yourself, imagine that all the *shoten zenjin* are around you, practicing Gongyo with you. Thus there is no loneliness.

Doing Gongyo is a depiction of yourself receiving the teachings of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō. Never forget that you are facing the Buddha. Behave well, and be earnest.

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## THE PURPOSE OF DAIMOKU & GONGYO

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**QUESTION: I have been told that chanting hours of daimoku will help me break through and acquire the things I need. Yet, there is no reference to this in Nichiren's writings. Is there any validity to this?**

**RH:** No. To believe in NamuMyōhōRengeKyō, means that you live based on the teachings of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō. To live as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra is what's important.

**QUESTION: In one of your lectures you said that the Gakkai<sup>8</sup> was wrong in telling its members to chant for things. It is hard to just seek Buddhahood, enlightenment, etc. when you are poor, hungry, and losing everything around you. Could you please expand on**

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<sup>6</sup> Gohonzon –the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which represents the universal Law of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō and the Buddha nature in all things.

<sup>7</sup> Daimoku – chanting NamuMyōhōRengeKyō, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>8</sup> Gakkai - SGI – Soka Gakkai International (Soka Gakkai) – a lay organization that wrongly incorporates some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism with its own philosophy and practice.

**your explanation because I don't live on a lotus blossom? I live in a phenomenal world with problems and challenges.**

**RH:** For a hungry person, give him food first then teach him how to reach Buddhahood. For a man who is struggling financially, give him a hand to help him come up with a solution, then teach him how to reach Buddhahood. Otherwise, the Law of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō won't enter his heart.

If your image of reaching Buddhahood is sitting on a lotus flower, it's best to lose that image. From Nichiren Daishonin's point of view, living your life as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra is attaining Buddhahood.

**B1:** Does your last sentence mean that our life is our book unfolding, and that despite all the happiness or hardships, difficulties and struggles that we endure, we are still able to strive to live honorably with the attitude that I have the Buddha within me and that I recognize the Buddha within all life? That no matter what condition I am in, I still have that awareness. Is that what enlightenment is?

**RH:** Yes, that's what it means.

**B2:** I have the SGI version of Gongyo and the liturgy of Nichiren Shoshu. I notice you recite something different than I have been reciting. Would it matter which Gongyo I recite? Or could I just stick with what I have from Nichiren Shoshu? It's shorter.

**RH:** I suggest that you practice the way we do. In the beginning it might be hard because it's additional and unfamiliar text. But once you get used to it, it becomes much easier. There is a Gongyo tape that I recorded and there's a Gongyo book. You can purchase these through [udumbarafoundation.org](http://udumbarafoundation.org). If you practice with the tape, you will be proficient in a few months.

I want you to clearly understand that the way we practice - reciting the *seoge*<sup>9</sup> - is not something conceived by me or this group. The way we recite Gongyo is the way Nichiren Daishonin practiced. About 25 years ago Shoshinkai priests reinstated the *seoge* (the extended Hoben chapter) into the practice. The way we practice Gongyo now is how Nichiren Shoshu practiced Gongyo before the Soka Gakkai became a part of Nichiren Shoshu. The Gakkai asked the head temple to create a Gongyo that was easier for lay believers to practice. So Taisekiji shortened it.

The reason the *seoge* is important is because of the passage *ichidaiji innen* - the one great reason why all Buddha's appear in this world. In Japan there is an old popular song about a chance meeting between a boy and a girl. It's raining outside, and one says to the other, "Here, you can borrow my umbrella." That is how they met; and at the end of the storm they get married. The storm is the great reason for their meeting and resulted in them getting married. In other words, there is an undeniable reason why each of us is in this world at this time. That teaching is a part of the *seoge*, and that is why it is important.

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<sup>9</sup> Seoge - the extended Hoben (2<sup>nd</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, beginning with the verse section that follows the *junyoze*..

**B3:** So things occur in life and they happen for a reason because one result will lead to another result. Is that what you mean?

**RH:** A cause intersects with fate and brings about an effect, and that effect in turn becomes a cause. For example, let's say an apple seed is a cause for a tree and more apples. So within that seed is the condensed form of a future effect. So the cause and effect are one and the same. They exist simultaneously within the seed. Our life, for example, from our parents' point of view is the effect. But from the child's point of view his/her life is a cause for future children. In other words, within your life is the life of the past, and the life of the future.

**B4:** So what happens to someone who has never been married or never had children? Does that mean that the future life is not contained within that person's life?

**RH:** No. A person who is alone, who doesn't have a family or never had children, is still alive, and has some kind of relationship with people around him or her. And even if you have no friends or nobody in your life, you still exist which means you still have a relationship with nature. You're breathing the air, drinking the water, etc. That's having a relationship with the things that contain Buddhahood within. So you still have past and future causes and effects within your life.

**B1:** When you say the cause intersects with fate, is fate then the present moment? Is it the destiny at the present moment that brings about an effect?

**RH:** Not quite. For example, you work. You get hungry. Getting hungry while working or after working is an effect. Then you eat. That would be fate or destiny. After eating you build up strength so that you can continue to work. And the cycle continues. Cause and effect are always together. To explain the concept we use two separate words, "cause" and "effect". But the true teaching explains that they are inseparable and that life doesn't end; life continues. The past, present and future life is contained within your life at this very moment. If a teaching differentiates between cause and effect, and past, present and future, then it is not the true teaching, because your present life contains the past and the future. That is the teaching of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō.



# Q & A CONCERNING GOHONZON

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**QUESTION:** A friend of mine recently left SGI and joined the Nichiren Shoshu temple. She begs me to get rid of my Gohonzon and insists that it is possessed with negative energy. It appears that SGI and Nichiren Shoshu temple are working to demonize each other: Why is the Gohonzon I have considered negative? In *The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon*, Nichiren says, "never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam myoho renge kyo. WND, Vo1, p. 832. Please explain what this means? Does the Gohonzon represent one's faith and determination? If we reveal the power of the Gohonzon through our faith why is one needed?

**RH:** ① Your friend says, "Get rid of your Gohonzon and exchange it for the Gohonzon that "I" (your friend (*zenchishiki*)<sup>10</sup>) thinks is correct. If you do that, your faith will be back on the correct path". She probably believes that because that's what has been drilled into her.

Of course, Gohonzon coming from an incorrect religion is never correct. Soka Gakkai is out of the question because they create Gohonzons as they please, and then hand them out to their members. Taisekiji<sup>11</sup> is also out of the question because the people who inscribe objects of worships (honzons) at Taisekiji didn't receive the correct *Kechimyaku*<sup>12</sup>. Also, the objects or worship of other sects of Buddhism depict Amida Buddha<sup>13</sup>, Dainichi Buddha<sup>14</sup>, or Bodhisattva Kannon<sup>15</sup> and don't show what their true teachings are. Therefore, with such objects of worship there's no way to be saved.

There is no such thing as a Gohonzon being possessed with negative energy. Even if the venerable Gohonzon is true, if the practitioner doesn't practice his faith and ignores the teachings of Buddhism, what do you think the venerable Gohonzon will do to that person? It will probably send some challenges his way so that he will realize it.

Fire and Water give us tremendous benefit, but if you use them incorrectly, you'll invite disaster. It's the same thing with Gohonzon. It's not a sin, its logic.

When a person without faith looks at the venerable Gohonzon, they will not think anything. In other words, the place where there is a venerable Gohonzon and a practitioner who is practicing the faith correctly, that is the true venerable Gohonzon.

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<sup>10</sup> Zenchishiki – someone who leads another to true Buddhism is considered a good friend (*zeshishiki*).

<sup>11</sup> Taisekiji – the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu. The priests and lay believers associated with the head temple.

<sup>12</sup> Kechimyaku – heritage or transmission of the Law that is handed down from master to disciple.

<sup>13</sup> Amida Buddha – Infinite Life or Infinite Light Buddha who is said to reside in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the Western region of the universe.

<sup>14</sup> Dainichi Buddha – a Buddha of the esoteric teachings who, it is said, is always in this world teaching the law.

<sup>15</sup> Bodhisattva Kannon – "He who Perceives the Sounds of the World" – a bodhisattva who assumes 33 different forms and manifests himself anywhere in the world to save people from suffering and danger.

② “The Real Aspect of Gohonzon” goshō states that the Gohonzon really resides inside of your heart, not somewhere outside of you as an object. Life is the heart. The physical body is a bag that envelopes the heart. If the heart is not saved, we cannot be saved and cannot be at peace.

③ The venerable Gohonzon is necessary because it was the only way to deliver the message to us humans beings. Out of necessity, Nichiren Daishonin made a representation of the message by writing it in Kanji with ink on a piece of paper or on a wooden board.

It is like a mirror. The shape you see in the mirror is a virtual image. But without using a mirror, we couldn't even see our faces, yet nobody gets upset because the image is not quite real.

In other words, the venerable Gohonzon's message to us is this: Your life is defiled by the life of the Ten Worlds<sup>16</sup>, but at the core of your life is the life of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō which is equal to Buddha.

You can't forget about that. Don't lose sight of that. You have to try to live this life in a way that indicates that you are a person who has a life that hosts Buddha within. Even if the steps you are taking are small, you have to try to live that way.

That's why you see NamuMyōhōRengeKyō written on a Gohonzon. Pray to this mirror (Gohonzon). The purpose of your faith, and to thus become Buddha, is to realize that the life of Buddha is within you.

Can you realize all this without the Venerable Nichiren Daishonin's<sup>17</sup> Gohonzon? If we look at a different object of worship that is other than NamuMyōhōRengeKyō, we can't realize this, that's why Nichiren Daishonin has shown NamuMyōhōRengeKyō to all life, addressing it straightforwardly.

**B1:** Some religions think that there are false idols, and therefore consider the Gohonzon to be a false idol. So if the Gohonzon is within us and within our faith, can you elaborate on why it is important to have a physical Gohonzon that we look at and pray to?

**RH:** The title of the Lotus Sutra is not NamuMyōhōRengeKyō, it is simply *MyōhōRengeKyō*. Gohonzon exists to represent something which cannot be represented. On the Gohonzon it says NamuMyōhōRengeKyō (devotion with your whole life to *MyōhōRengekyō*) down the middle, which is a message that will guide all beings to the way of *MyōhōRengeKyō*. Gohonzon represents that which is within you, but that thing is something that cannot really be expressed. For example, the word “heart” is represented by the letters **h e a r t**. But these letters themselves are not the heart itself. The letters make a word which is just a means to communicate what it is. Just as the word “heart” describes what it is, the Gohonzon is outside of you to communicate a message that people would not otherwise get or understand.

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<sup>16</sup> Ten Worlds – potential conditions of life inherent in each individual. They are: Hell, hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven or Bliss, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddhahood.

<sup>17</sup> Nichiren Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

We pray to Gohonzon which is physically outside of our bodies, but by praying to Gohonzon we return Gohonzon back to us. So it doesn't matter whether Gohonzon itself is big or small, new or old, or looks more powerful or less powerful. That doesn't matter, because once you start looking at only the external, physical aspect of Gohonzon, you have forgotten what the Gohonzon really represents. This is explained in the goshō "The Real Aspect of Gohonzon," which states, "Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant NamuMyōhōRengeKyō....The Gohonzon is found in faith alone...."<sup>18</sup>

**B2:** What I understand from what you have just said is that the Gohonzon serves as a representation of your commitment to the Law of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō, just like someone who is committed to a relationship will wear a ring to represent that commitment. It doesn't represent a marriage, but it represents the commitment that two people have with one another.

**RH:** You may have understood what I said in that way, but the Gohonzon is a mirror. Without a mirror you cannot see yourself. The Gohonzon is showing you what your life is. That's what Gohonzon is. Without looking at yourself in a mirror you would never know what you look like. But what you see in the mirror is not actually you; it's a reflection of who you are.

**B2:** If the Gohonzon I have is counterfeit would it be true to say that members of SGI have formed a reverse relationship with the Mystic Law? Would this poison-drum relationship also apply to new members who don't have a full understanding of Buddhism?

**RH:** Their attitude is poisonous. Soka Gakkai creates Gohonzons as they wish. They say "Well, we used the original Gohonzon to print them from, so they are real". But, that's the same as saying: "We made this money just like the real thing, so it's real". They exploit them for themselves - they will even use the object of worship as a stepping-stone to fulfill their interest. You don't call that having faith in NamuMyōhōRengeKyō.

**B1:** When you say that the Gohonzon is counterfeit, are you saying that that Gohonzon isn't a mirror at all into your soul? In other words, if you have a false Gohonzon from the Soka Gakkai or Taiseikiji, then those Gohonzons don't represent a mirror into your soul. Is that correct?

**RH:** Those honzons are like broken or distorted mirrors. Taiseikiji or SGI honzons are declarations of their own self-righteousness. That is, they created them out of their self-righteousness, asserting that they are right or their way is correct. Their honzons do not represent the Buddhahood that resides within you.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 1 p. 213.

**B1:** Even though the Gakkai is practicing NamuMyōhōRengeKyō wrongly at the present time, because they are chanting, does that mean that they will practice NamuMyōhōRengeKyō correctly in the future? Isn't that what is considered a poison-drum relationship? Or what is a poison-drum relationship?

**RH:** The Soka Gakkai says that they are practicing Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, but the content of what they are practicing was created by Daisaku Ikeda.<sup>19</sup> To the Gakkai, Daisaku Ikeda is more important than Nichiren Daishonin. On the surface their practice looks like the teachings of Nichiren, but when you look at the inside or the contents of their practice it is not. What they are practicing was crafted by Daisaku Ikeda.

**B1:** In other words, the Daishonin's concepts do not apply to the Soka Gakkai or to anyone who is practicing or interpreting the teachings incorrectly. So the poison-drum theory is null and void with the Gakkai. So if the correct teachings are introduced to someone and they reject it, a good seed is still planted within that person for it to grow sometime in the future. That is what is known as a poison-drum or reverse relationship because it is based on the correct teaching. But when the Gakkai introduces its false teaching to someone, and that person rejects it, then a good seed has not been planted. Therefore that is not a poison-drum relationship. Because if you practice the Gakkai's teachings, or if you hear the Gakkai's teaching, you will reap the result of the Gakkai's teachings and not the result of the Daishonin's teaching. Is that correct?

**RH:** Yes, that's correct.

**QUESTION:** What is the significance of the different types of Gohonzons and what makes them different, that is the *Omamori*, the *Okatage* and the funeral Gohonzon?

**RH:** The source of all those Gohonzons is the same.

In past times, the venerable *Omamori* Gohonzon was used for traveling. Back in the day, to travel meant to risk your life. In order to practice Gongyo where they were staying, people carried a portable object of worship. The *Omamori*, or good luck charm, came from that custom. The name is not fitting, and the mode of travel is also quite different now. Back then, people traveled by foot and walked fast. They exhausted their bodies and risked their lives, because encountering bandits and pirates was quite possible. Life and death were back to back in those days.

Because the particular printing processes known as *katagi* did not yet exist during the Kamakura Era (which is the time period when Nichiren Daishonin lived), *Okatage* Gohonzons didn't exist. And, there were not many believers so everything was handwritten.

The venerable Funeral Gohonzon doesn't show the usual *Nyaku-Nohransha-Zuha-Shichibun* ("If you slander the Law your mind will disintegrate into seven pieces.") and *Uku-*

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<sup>19</sup> Daisaku Ikeda – president of SGI

*Yohshafuku-Ka-Jyu-Goh* (“The one who chants NamuMyōhōRengeKyō has more good fortune than Buddha”).

The venerable Funeral Gohonzon does show *Sokushin-Jobutsu-No-Inmon-Nari* which emphasizes realizing Buddhahood while the person is physically alive. However, this basic teaching is the same on all venerable Gohonzons. There is no discrimination or hierarchy among Gohonzons.

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## DISCUSSION

### *TENJU KYO-JU & HENDAKU IYAKU*

Reverend Raidō Hirota  
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**QUESTION:** I have met SGI members who believe that they can continue with negative behavior as long as they chant lots of daimoku. Please explain Nichiren's heart when he wrote the goshō “On Lessening Karmic Retribution.”

**RH:** “Tenju-Kyo-Ju” (lessening karmic retribution) is a teaching in the Nirvana Sutra<sup>20</sup>. The heavy sins that were committed as slander in a past life can be experienced in a lesser degree in this life by having faith in NamuMyōhōRengeKyō.

This means that the sins will not be eliminated or be reduced to zero as the Soka Gakkai teaches their believers. If you do something wrong, you won't be able to run away from the consequences. The sin might get lighter, but you'll receive your due and you'll recognize it. Then, you will reflect on your past conduct. You have to switch your consciousness to reflect on the challenges that come with the practice of devotion to NamuMyōhōRengeKyō.

**B1:** I think the key phrase in your answer above is “switch your consciousness.” It is my belief that big problems arise because people don't do that. They aren't able to switch their consciousness. They hold on to what they were taught by SGI and Taiseikiji, and then they try to understand the teachings of the Daishonin conveyed by you through that filter. Consequently, because they haven't changed their consciousness, they don't understand you and think that what you are saying is wrong.

**RH:** Exactly.

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<sup>20</sup> Nirvana Sutra – *Hatsunaion Sutra (Parinirvana Sutra)*

You cannot live the way Nichiren Daishonin lived his life; and you cannot replicate Nichiren Daishonin's life. Each one of you has your own life. The way Nichiren lived his life is like a text book. You have to study his life, but you have to create your own life, because no two lives are the same. So Nichiren's teachings are the guide that you use along the path of your own life. You have to have a sense of your own identity, and faith in your own authenticity. You are not a robot. You're not a copy of someone else's life. Your life is your life. It is important that you be aware of that.

**QUESTION: *Hendoku Iyaku*, changing poison into medicine - what is the poison? What is the medicine? How does the process of changing poison into medicine actually happen? And how do we see it in our daily lives?**

**RH:** In this world, medicine is made by isolating and incubating pathogens that can be used to heal. In other words, medicine is made from poison. The medicine is within the poison. So, you could say that if you use medicine incorrectly, it could be poisonous.

In Buddhist terms, poison is "the realm of desire" - the realm of Hell, the realm of Hungry spirits, the Animal realm, the Human realm, the realm of Anger, the realm of Bliss or the Heavenly state, the realm of Learning, the realm of Realization, and the realm of Bodhisattva.<sup>21</sup> The realms especially from Hell to Bliss or Heaven are called "the realms of desire", and they become negative factors that subvert human beings. The realms from Learning to Bodhisattva are another kind of negative factor that brings down human beings by them thinking from their ego that they might be better than Buddha.

Teachings that were taught before the Lotus Sutra explain that you can only attain Buddhahood after you eliminated all that confusion; but the Lotus Sutra teaches that that is impossible. Unless a teaching teaches us how to become Buddha in this life, it's not the true Law.

Even foolish and confused human beings are blessed with the life of Buddha. So, even if you can only do it a little bit, try to live as a being that possesses the life of Buddha. And try to tell others who don't know this or haven't noticed that they too possess the Buddha within. That, is "*Hendoku Iyaku*"(changing poison into medicine).

This is the only way for our hearts and the world to be filled with happiness.



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<sup>21</sup> The realm of Hell ...to the realm of Bodhisattva – the first nine of the ten life conditions inherent in each individual.

# HONBUTSU<sup>22</sup> & SHAKUBUTSU<sup>23</sup> REVISITED

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**QUESTION:** I have read in the gosho where Nichiren Daishonin refers to Shakyamuni<sup>24</sup> as our sovereign, teacher and parent. I was wondering why he says that, and why we say it is Nichiren who fulfills these roles.

**RH:** The venerable Nichiren Daishonin says Shakyamuni is Buddha, but why do we call the venerable Nichiren Daishonin Buddha? Why are we saying something different from what the venerable Nichiren Daishonin was saying? – Is that your question?

There are many religions in the world that are devoted to Shakyamuni and regard Shakyamuni as the object of worship. However, the venerable Nichiren Daishonin respected and acknowledged Shakyamuni as Buddha only because Shakyamuni taught the Lotus Sutra. Shakyamuni prior to teaching the Lotus Sutra is not what one should aspire to; and the teachings prior to the Lotus Sutra are not accepted.

In other words, the respect the venerable Nichiren Daishonin had for Shakyamuni is centered on the teachings of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō. He acknowledged Shakyamuni as Buddha because Shakyamuni taught and realized NamuMyōhōRengeKyō and reached Buddhahood.

Other religions which consider Shakyamuni as Buddha and as the object of worship have faith in Shakyamuni himself no matter when or what he taught. This is called *Hongamyo*<sup>25</sup> (original effect). This means that a person practices a religion without thinking about the basic teachings, and respects and believes in the “sacred Buddha’s way.”

The venerable Nichiren Daishonin, however, saw the teachings as the heart of faith, and respected the *Ninpo-Ikka* Buddha<sup>26</sup> (the person who had merged with the Law or was one with the Law) who taught this to all sentient beings. This is called *Honnin-Myo*<sup>27</sup> (original cause). We consider the venerable Nichiren Daishonin as the *Honnin-Myo* Buddha because he was the first to teach the root of the teachings, which is the source of all life.

Most people in this world think the flesh of an apple is the apple, and the rest is scrap. But, from an apple’s stand point, the seed is the source of its life to continue on, and the flesh is the nutrition that allows the seed to sprout.

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<sup>22</sup> Honbutsu – original Buddha

<sup>23</sup> Shakubutsu – provisional Buddha

<sup>24</sup> Shakyamuni – Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE – 949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism in this world.

<sup>25</sup> Hongamyo – true effect, the enlightenment that Shakyamuni attained at a time in the inconceivably distant past.

<sup>26</sup> Ninpo-ikka Buddha – the ultimate Law of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō and the Person – the original Buddha – are one. Nichiren Daishonin who realized the Law of NamuMyōhōRengeKyō and manifested it both as an invocation and in material form as Gohonzon.

<sup>27</sup> Honnin-myo – true, or original cause – the original or fundamental Law which enables all Buddhas to become enlightened.

Imagine that the flesh of an apple is the original effect (*Honga-Myo*). Then imagine that the seed, the final result, is the original cause (*Honnin-Myo*). Once you eat the apple, *Honga-Myo* (the effect) is over, and it only brought satisfaction to you, alone.

However, the original cause (*Honnin-Myo*) – a seed – creates hundreds of fruits, and sends off a life to the next generation, and the next generation. This life is forever. It connects to many lives, and expands into all life.

The Buddha of true Effect (*Honga-Myo*) is a “Shakubutsu” or provisional Buddha. The Buddha of true Cause (*Honnin-Myo*) is the “Honbutsu” or original Buddha.

“Honbutsu” or original Buddha is like the main body, and “Shakubutsu” or provisional Buddha is like the shadow or silhouette of the original Buddha. A shadow does not exist unless there is a body. Or to put it another way, “Honbutsu” is the starring actor and “Shakubutsu” is the supporting actor. Another way of understanding the difference is that the “Honbutsu” is the actual thing and the “Shakubutsu” is the virtual image.

That’s the difference between the teachings of Shakyamuni and the venerable Nichiren Daishonin.

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## ON NATURAL DISASTERS

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

December 2011

**QUESTION:** In Daishonin’s day, they looked upon natural disasters (earthquakes, floods and famine) as omens. Nichiren Daishonin even said that these natural occurrences were a result of people’s slandering the correct Law. In this modern era, with the scientific knowledge of the history and evolution of our planet, it is hard to view earthquakes and other natural disasters as a result of slander of the true Law, but rather as a natural result of the planet’s evolution. The unfortunate thing for humans is that we have created a way of life wherein the things we depend on to sustain us (electricity, nuclear power) are the very things that could kill us, especially in the wake of a natural disaster as we have seen in Japan. So, what is the correct view? What is really going on here? Is it just nature doing its thing, or is it the result of the slanderous minds’ of humankind?

**RH:** The Lotus Sutra’s teaching of *Ichinen-Sanzen*<sup>28</sup> tells us that because all life is connected, we exist. That means that human life and the natural world are connected. If air and water are dirty, human life will be dirty. If there is a heinous crime committed, the whole world falls into the realm of darkness.

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<sup>28</sup> Ichinen Sanzen – a single life moment contains three thousand realms of existence.

The venerable Nichiren Daishonin showed us that if the land is chaotic, people's hearts will be distressed. If people's hearts are in distress, the natural world will be in disorder. Nichiren Daishonin's teaching tells us that there is no separation between nature and human beings.

Because people's hearts were in distress, the natural world would be in a jumble, if the natural world was in a jumble, people's hearts would be in that state as well.

Accept all that is happening as a warning, and always question the way you live this life. Ask yourself if your thinking has deviated from the Law. We are warned not to view ourselves as the superior existence or think that we can naturally reign over all life.

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## GOSHO SELECTION

### **"The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon"<sup>29</sup>**

I have received your offerings to the Gohonzon of five kan of coins, one horse-load of rice, and fruit. Of the fifty years of teachings in the Buddha's lifetime, only during his last eight years was this teaching revealed. The Lotus Sutra, which was expounded during that period, explains the Gohonzon in the eight chapters from the Yujutsu through the Zokurui<sup>30</sup> chapter. After the Buddha's death, in the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days<sup>31</sup> of the Law, not even the term "object of worship of the essential teaching" was mentioned, let alone the object itself being inscribed. Nor was there anyone capable of inscribing it. T'ien-t'ai,<sup>32</sup> Miao-lo<sup>33</sup> and Dengyo<sup>34</sup> perceived it in their hearts but for some reason never expounded it, just as Yen Hui<sup>35</sup> realized the true meaning of Confucius' teaching but kept it secret. Yet the sutra itself as well as T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo's annotations explicitly state that the Gohonzon will appear in the first five hundred years of the Latter Day of the Law<sup>36</sup>, a little more than two thousand years after the Buddha's death.

Now, over two hundred years have passed since the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. How awesome that Nichiren was the first to inscribe this great mandala as the banner

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<sup>29</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 1, p 211

<sup>30</sup> Yujutsu through the Zokurui chapter – chapters 15 to 22 of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>31</sup> Former and Middle Sages of the Law – 949 BCE – 1052 CE – the 2000 years that followed Shakyamuni Buddha's death

<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> Miao-lo – (711-782) – the sixth patriarch of the T'ien-t'ai school in China who reasserted the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>34</sup> Dengyo – (767-822) founder of the Tendai sect of Buddhism in Japan.

<sup>35</sup> Yen Hui – 521-490 BCE – one of the most respected and trusted disciples of Confucius.

<sup>36</sup> Latter Day of the Law – *Mappo* began in 1052 CE.

of propagation of the Lotus Sutra, when even such great masters as Nagarjuna,<sup>37</sup> Vasubandhu,<sup>38</sup> T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo were unable to do so! This mandala is in no way Nichiren's invention. It is the object of worship which perfectly depicts Lord Shakyamuni in the Treasure Tower and all the other Buddhas who were present, as accurately as the print matches the woodblock. The five characters of the Lotus Sutra's title are inscribed in the center of the Treasure Tower, while the Four Heavenly Kings are seated at the four corners. Shakyamuni and Taho<sup>39</sup> Buddhas, as well as the four leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth<sup>40</sup>, are lined across the top. Seated below them are the Bodhisattvas Fugen and Monju<sup>41</sup>, and men of learning, including Shariputra and Maudgalyayana<sup>42</sup>. Beside them are posted the gods of the sun and moon, the Devil of the Sixth Heaven,<sup>43</sup> the Dragon King and ashura; Fudo and Aizen<sup>44</sup> take up their stations to the south and north, respectively. The devilishly treacherous Devadatta<sup>45</sup> and the Dragon King's ignorant daughter<sup>46</sup> attend, too. The demon Kishimojin<sup>47</sup> appears with her ten daughters, who sap the lives of people throughout the universe. Also present are the guardian deities of Japan: Tensho Daijin<sup>48</sup> and Bodhisattva Hachiman,<sup>49</sup> representing the seven ranks of heavenly gods, the five ranks of earthly gods, and all other major and minor gods in general.

As all the gods appear in their essence, so must they appear in their manifestations. The Hoto chapter<sup>50</sup> states, "All the assembly were lifted and present in the air." Dwelling in the Gohonzon are all the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and great saints, as well as the eight groups of sentient beings of the two realms<sup>51</sup> who appear in the first chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Illuminated by the five characters of the Mystic Law, they display the enlightened nature they inherently possess. This is the true object of worship.

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<sup>37</sup> Nagarjuna – a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century Mahayana Buddhist scholar who organized the theoretical foundation of Mahayana thought. He is considered as the fourteenth of Shakyamuni Buddha's successors.

<sup>38</sup> Vasubandhu – a 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist scholar who is considered as the twenty-first of Shakyamuni Buddha's successors. He first mastered Hinayana Buddhism and later converted to Mahayana which he promoted widely.

<sup>39</sup> Taho – "Many Treasures" Buddha who vowed to attest to the validity of the Lotus Sutra wherever it was preached.

<sup>40</sup> Four Leaders of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth – four bodhisattvas who first appear in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra and signify the four virtues of the Buddha (true self, eternity, purity, and happiness).

<sup>41</sup> Bodhisattvas Fugen and Monju – (Monju = Monjushiri) - two bodhisattvas who attended Shakyamuni. Fugen represents truth and practice, and Monjushiri represents wisdom and enlightenment.

<sup>42</sup> Shariputra and Maudgalyayana – two of Shakyamuni's ten major disciples regarded as foremost in wisdom and foremost in occult powers respectively.

<sup>43</sup> Devil of the Sixth Heaven – the king of devils who works to obstruct Buddhist practice and delights in sapping the life force of other beings.

<sup>44</sup> Fudo and Aizen – two Buddhist deities. Fudo serves practitioners by defeating the obstacles and devils which hinder Buddhist practice; Aizen purifies people's earthly desires and frees them from illusions and the sufferings arising from earthly desires.

<sup>45</sup> Devadatta – a cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha who opposed the Buddha out of jealousy and attempted to assassinate him on several occasions.

<sup>46</sup> The Dragon King's daughter – an 8-year old child of a dragon king said to have lived at the bottom of sea. It is said she began to seek enlightenment upon hearing Bodhisattva Monjushiri preach the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>47</sup> Kishimojin – a female demon who killed the babies of other people to feed her 500 hundred children, later vowed in the 26<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra that she and her ten daughters would protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>48</sup> Tensho Daijin – Japanese sun goddess.

<sup>49</sup> Bodhisattva Hachiman – a Japanese deity who Nichiren Daishonin regarded as the "personification of the function which promotes the agricultural fertility of a land whose inhabitants embrace the True Law."

<sup>50</sup> Hoto chapter – 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

<sup>51</sup> Two realms – the realms of desire and matter.

This manifestation is what the sutra means by "all phenomena reveal the true entity." Miao-lo states, "The true entity is invariably revealed in all phenomena, and all phenomena invariably possess the Ten Factors.<sup>52</sup> The Ten Factors invariably function within the Ten Worlds, the Ten Worlds invariably entail both life and its environment." T'ien-t'ai states, "The profound principle of 'true entity' is the original Law of Myōhōrengekyō." The Great Teacher Dengyo wrote, "The entity of *ichinen sanzen* is the Buddha who obtained enlightenment for himself, and that Buddha assumes no august attributes." Therefore this Gohonzon is the supreme mandala never before known, for it has not appeared until more than twenty-two hundred and twenty years after the Buddha's death.

A woman who devotes herself to the Gohonzon invites happiness in this life, and in the next, the Gohonzon will be with her and protect her always. Like a lantern in the dark, like a strong supporting arm on a treacherous path, the Gohonzon will protect you, Lady Nichinyo, wherever you go. Therefore you should ward off slanderers as you would prevent a courtesan from entering your house. That is the meaning of "Part with bad friends and seek out good ones."

Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Namumyōhōrengekyō. The body is the palace of the ninth consciousness<sup>53</sup>, the unchanging reality which reigns over all life's functions. To be "endowed with the Ten Worlds" means that all the Ten Worlds without exception are contained in the one world of Buddhahood. That is why the Gohonzon is called a mandala. Mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning "perfectly endowed" or "cluster of blessings." The Gohonzon is found in faith alone. As the sutra states, "Only with faith can one enter Buddhahood."

Since Nichiren's disciples, both priests and laymen, believe in the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra, which states, "... honestly discarding the provisional teachings" and "Never accept even a single phrase from other sutras," they can enter the Treasure Tower of the Gohonzon. How reassuring! Make every possible effort for the sake of your next life. The most important thing is to chant only Namumyōhōrengekyō and attain enlightenment. All depends on the strength of your faith. To have faith is the basis of Buddhism. That is why the fourth volume of the Maka Shikan states, "Buddhism is a vast ocean, but only those with faith can enter." In interpreting this passage, Miao-lo writes in the fourth volume of his Guketsu, "Even Confucius teaches that faith is first and foremost. This is all the more true with the profound doctrines of Buddhism! Without faith, how can one possibly approach them? That is why the Kegon Sutra defines faith as the basis of practice and the mother of blessings." The first volume of the Maka Shikan further states, "How does one hear, believe in and practice the perfect teaching to attain perfect enlightenment?" Volume One of the Guketsu interprets this: "To 'believe in the perfect teaching' means to awaken faith through doctrine and make faith the basis of practice." A classical document tells of the Emperor of Han, who so implicitly believed his aide's report that he found the river actually frozen. Another relates

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<sup>52</sup> Ten Factors – the unchanging aspects of life that are common to all forms of life. They are: appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, consistency from beginning to end.

<sup>53</sup> Ninth consciousness – the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō – the fundamental purifying force that is the essence of our lives

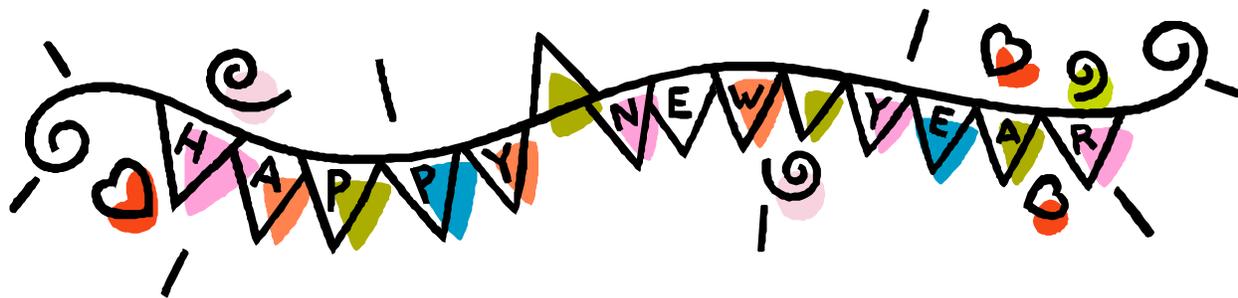
how Li Kuang<sup>54</sup>, eager to revenge his father, pierced with his arrow a boulder hidden in the grass. T'ien-t'ai and Miao-lo's annotations make it absolutely clear that faith is the cornerstone. Because the Han emperor believed without doubt in his retainer's words, the river froze over. And Li Kuang was able to pierce a rock with his arrow because he fully believed it to be the tiger that killed his father. Faith is still more powerful in the world of Buddhism.

Embracing the Lotus Sutra and chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō encompass all five practices which the Great Teacher Dengyo personally inherited from Priest Tao-sui<sup>55</sup> when he journeyed to China. This is the primary teaching for Nichiren's disciples and believers. It is the practice which appears in the Jinriki chapter<sup>56</sup>. I will give you more details later.

Respectfully,  
Nichiren

The twenty-third day of the eighth month in the third year of Kenji  
(1277)  
Aug 23, 1277  
To Lady Nichinyo

May the roots of goodness  
take hold in our hearts and flourish!



<sup>54</sup> Li Kuang – a general from the Former Han Dynasty

<sup>55</sup> Tao-sui – the 10<sup>th</sup> successor of the T'ien-t'ai sect in China, who studied under Miao-lo

<sup>56</sup> Jinriki chapter – chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra.