

# THE MIDDLE WAY

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SPRING

2013



## GOJUKAI CEREMONY

Reverend Raido Hirota

International Meeting

May 2012



THIS IS A GOHONZON. GOHONZON IS THE ROOT OF OUR FAITH. WITH THIS GOHONZON I WILL TAP YOU ON THE HEAD THREE TIMES WHILE I CHANT DAIMOKU. PLEASE CHANT ALONG WITH ME.

THE THREE TAPS ON THE HEAD INDICATE THE WISH FOR YOU TO PERCEIVE THE BUDDHA OF NAMUMYÖHÖRENGEKYÖ DEEP IN YOUR HEART.

**THE FIRST TAP** INDICATES THAT YOU, AS AN ORDINARY HUMAN BEING, MUST RENOUNCE ALL RELIGIONS OTHER THAN THE RELIGION OF THE LOTUS SUTRA AS WELL AS ALL HERETICAL TEACHINGS OF HERETICAL TEACHERS, AND ACCEPT THE TRUE LAW, THE TRUE TEACHER AND THE TRUE TEACHINGS AND CARRY THROUGH WITH YOUR FAITH, EVEN IF YOU ARE CONFUSED, UNTIL YOU REALIZE THAT THE COMMON MORTAL POSSESSES THE BUDDHA NATURE WITHIN HIS LIFE.

**THE SECOND TAP** INDICATES THAT YOU, AS AN ORDINARY HUMAN BEING, MUST RENOUNCE ALL RELIGIONS OTHER THAN THE RELIGION OF THE LOTUS SUTRA, AVOID COMMITTING SLANDER, AND ACCEPT THE THREE GREAT SECRET LAWS: THE TRUE OBJECT OF WORSHIP (HONMON NO HONZON), THE TRUE INVOCATION (HONMON NO DAIMOKU { NAMUMYÖHÖRENGEKYÖ }) AND THE TRUE SANCTUARY (HONMON NO K Aidan).

**THE THIRD TAP** INDICATES THAT YOU, AS AN ORDINARY HUMAN BEING, MUST RENOUNCE ALL RELIGIONS OTHER THAN THE RELIGION OF THE LOTUS SUTRA, AND IN ADDITION YOU MUST PLEDGE NOT TO LIE TO THE LAW OF MYÖHÖRENGEKYÖ FOR SUCH A LIE IS GRAVER THAN ANY WORLDLY LIE.

I ASK YOU TO MAKE THESE VOWS TO GOHONZON. AND I URGE YOU TO PLEASE CHERISH NO OTHER FAITH OTHER THAN THE TRUE FAITH OF THE LOTUS SUTRA, AND TO NOT MAKE THE MISTAKE OF CLINGING TO DELUSIONS.

NOW THAT YOU HAVE GOHONZON IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU DO GONGYO AND DAIMOKU EVERY MORNING AND EVENING.

**Believer 1 (B1):** Many years ago when I was at the Nichiren Shoshu<sup>1</sup> temple in Etiwanda, California, I went through the ceremony of Gojukai<sup>2</sup>. But because NSA, now SGI<sup>3</sup>, had wrongly instructed people, and the ceremony was conducted in Japanese, and some of us had only been to a meeting a week before, we did not understand what was happening. Since that is the case, 1) would you recommend we go through Gojukai ceremony again? And 2) was that Gojukai ceremony simply a show, not really effective because we didn't understand what we were being asked to dedicate our life to. We were told that we could practice other religions at the same time that we practiced Nichiren Shoshu.

**Reverend Raido Hirota (RH):** Yes, I recommend that you receive Gojukai again. There's a big difference between a child being taken by his parents to receive Gojukai and going through the ceremony versus an adult who is aware and makes the conscious decision to receive the ceremony, wants to receive the ceremony and understands what is taking place. So yes, I recommend that you receive Gojukai again because Gojukai is the place where you make the first commitment to this teaching and this way of living. So it should be understood. It is not like your experience years ago. It is just like a marriage. Everyone knows that when they get married they are

marrying someone they've chosen to marry. It's not like one person suddenly realizes, Oh! I'm married.

In the case of children being brought by their parents to receive Gojukai, it is the parent's responsibility to teach their children as they grow up why they received Gojukai, and support their child's development of faith and understanding of true Buddhism.

**Believer 2 (B2):** I started with SGI five years ago. I didn't know anything about Gojukai or the priesthood. What was explained to me was just to chant Namumyōhōrengekyō<sup>4</sup>. But since I was introduced to the practice through SGI I understand that my Gohonzon<sup>5</sup> is not valid. I understand how important it is to receive Gojukai first. But because I didn't receive Gojukai, does that erase my five years of chanting.

**RH:** It is the same as if you had received Gojukai. It's the same as a couple who got married without a wedding or a reception. As a memory, it is sad that you did not have a Gojukai ceremony, but it doesn't diminish the value of your chanting. It's the same as a child who is born, as he grows up he doesn't remember the moment he was born. But it doesn't mean he doesn't exist.

The words from the Gojukai ceremony above, "carry through with your faith, even if you are confused, until you realize that the common mortal possesses the Buddha nature within his life," and "cherish no other faith other than the true faith of the Lotus Sutra"— Namumyōhōrengekyō, even

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<sup>1</sup> Nichiren Shoshu – a sect of Buddhism that embraces and recites the true Law Namumyōhōrengekyō as the original cause of enlightenment and believes in Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

<sup>2</sup> Gojukai – the conversion ceremony where one converts from former religious beliefs and accepts and commits to faith in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.

<sup>3</sup> SGI – Soka Gakkai International – a lay organization that wrongly incorporates some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism into its own philosophy and practice.

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<sup>4</sup> Namumyōhōrengekyō – the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

<sup>5</sup> Gohonzon – the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which represents the universal Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and the Buddha nature in all things.

if you didn't receive the proper Gojukai, you should keep these words in your heart to help you live as a practitioner of this teaching. You cannot forget about this. The worse way of practicing this religion is to not know why you starting practicing. So when someone decides, well I've had enough of this, I'm done with it, then he/she quits practicing because there's no anchor that holds him/her to this teaching. That is the most dangerous kind of practice of this religion.

**B3:** You said it doesn't matter that B2 did not have Gojukai as long as she has the right attitude in her heart. Then why do we need to have Gojukai at all? And can those people who have not received Gojukai receive it when you come?

**RH:** Whether you received Gojukai or not, it doesn't change the value or weight of your beliefs in this religion. What I meant to say was that there are people who want to receive Gojukai, but there isn't a temple around, or they haven't met the right priest, etc. Then there are people who have the chance to receive Gojukai, but they become lazy or complacent, or don't care. Gojukai for them is out of the question. But for people who want to receive it but haven't had the opportunity, when the chance comes, and the priest is sure that that person will stay with this religion—that the practitioner is committed—and the opportunity to receive Gojukai is present, then one should definitely do it. It's not that you need it. Unless there is a lot of meaning behind it, it doesn't really mean much. For example, the Gojukai that B1 experienced doesn't count because he didn't understand why he was really doing it. He said it was like a show. There's a difference between not receiving Gojukai vs. doing it in the wrong way.

I will not perform a Gojukai ceremony for people I have never met, or never had a conversation with. I have to make sure the person is committed to this way of living and this teaching. But if I have verified that a person is committed to this practice before I come over, then I will perform the ceremony.

**B1:** Because of some of the strange teachings of the temple and SGI, the changes to the teachings of Nichiren Shoshu by Taisekij<sup>6</sup>i in the past in order to satisfy SGI, I have wanted to wait until I was sure that the commitment I was making was one that I could live with. It's been over a year since I first started participating in this group. Everything seems sensible, and everything seems correct. After meeting Rev. Hirota face to face I will ask him to perform Gojukai. But after the problems in the past, I don't want to jump into something without knowing. I do know why I got Gojukai the first time. It was because the girl who introduced me was very beautiful. Back then, the way that the Soka Gakkai was doing their shakubuku<sup>7</sup> was to get people to sign up for any reason without giving them an explanation of what they were doing.

**RH:** Before Skype I couldn't talk to you or meet with you until I visited the U.S. After meeting you I would assess your commitment, and a year later I would make sure your commitment was still alive. Then I would perform a Gojukai ceremony. But now with our regular Skype meetings, I can hear and sense how you feel about practicing this religion. So even at our first

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<sup>6</sup> Taisekiji – the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu – here refers to the organization of Nichiren Shoshu (NST).

<sup>7</sup> Shakabuku – a method of propagating Buddhism by directly leading a person to the True Law and refuting erroneous views.

physical meeting it would be okay for me to perform Gojukai if both parties are amenable and I feel that you aren't just saying beautiful words, but are living in the way that a practitioner lives in this religion. I have the responsibility as a priest to only perform Gojukai for those people who are committed to practicing this religion. So it is important that you speak your truth to me. Tell me how you truly feel about this religion so that I can determine how serious

you are about practicing correctly. The committed practitioner is not someone who says, "Oh, I'm really into this. I'm really committed this year." But then next year something happens and he says, "I'm leaving." Then in a while the person will come back again. If I give Gojukai to such a person, it is my fault for it is part of my responsibility to foresee that. So I appreciate listening to you and hearing what you have to say.

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## SHOMAN & ENGAKU

Reverend Raido Hirota  
Bucks County, Pennsylvania  
June 2012

**QUESTION: Who are the shomon and engaku of today?**

**RH:**Our life is described as a "mutual possession of the Ten Worlds<sup>8</sup>"; every person has the potential to manifest Buddhahood, while a Buddha also possesses the nine worlds. Thus, the shomon and engaku are not specific persons but all of us have the possibility of becoming the shomon and engaku.

**B3:** Aren't the shomon and engaku conditions within every living thing, where you are at a level of realization like creative people, or intelligent people, or people who practice different spiritual disciplines and

they think they've reached a certain level of understanding, but they aren't on the path to enlightenment? So when you say that all of us have the possibility of becoming shomon and engaku, does that mean that within all of us is the possibility of losing our way, thinking that we've reached a level of understanding and we are satisfied with that point?

**RH:**Shomon are basically the people who immediately understood the Buddha's teachings philosophically. Engaku is the person who has the ability to understand the Buddha's teaching without listening or hearing the teachings, but understands it by observing nature and the world, or feeling the wind, or by observing how people live. Shomon and engaku would be considered elite persons. However, even people without a high degree of education, which

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<sup>8</sup> Ten Worlds – potential conditions of life inherent in each individual. They are: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven or Bliss, Learning (Shomon), Realization (Engaku), Bodhisattva, and Buddha.

is most people, have the tendency to think, “I’m right.” Everyone thinks that way. Even though there may be a misunderstanding about something, or a lack of understanding something, people have the tendency to think, “I’m still right. I’m interpreting it in the right way.” Everyone—all people—think this way.

Even though we are not elite, or we may not have enough education, every one of us has the possibility of being a shomon or engaku. I can’t identify who is shomon or engaku, but everyone has the possibility of being shomon or engaku in the wrong way because people have that tendency to believe that they are right.

The Buddha teaches that all life has the Ten Worlds: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Rapture, Shomon, Engaku, Bodhisattva, Buddha. The people who think they know everything are the shomon and engaku. But actually they have less possibility of reaching enlightenment than the four lower worlds of Hell, Hunger, Animality and Anger.

**B3:** Why do the four lower worlds have a greater chance of becoming enlightened than the shomon and engaku?

**RH:**Shomon and Engaku believe in themselves and the power of their abilities. They hold on to their own thoughts and won’t relinquish them. It is not easy for them to change their minds.

**B3:** How can we avoid becoming shomon and engaku, or how can we get ourselves out of that way of thinking?

**RH:**We cannot avoid our own beliefs and thoughts. Human beings cannot avoid their way of thinking. They can’t stop it. However, if we try to understand what Buddha was trying to teach us, it may prompt us to

change our beliefs rather than hold on to them like shomon and engaku. Nichiren Daishonin<sup>9</sup> said he would stop practicing Namumyōhōrengekyō if someone could show him a superior Law that was based on reason. In Christianity there is a covenant between mankind and god. Man is supposed to accept anything that is taught, even if it is not understood or is not reasonable, to wit the birth of Christ by the Virgin Mary. Whatever is taught, Christians have to swallow. By contrast, Nichiren Daishonin said in his own words, if it makes sense, if it is reasonable, I will leave Namumyōhōrengekyō and take faith in another teaching if it is proven superior. So as you can see, the difference between Christianity and Buddhism is that Buddhism is based on reason. The emphasis is on *reason* in Buddhism. Christianity, on the other hand, is based on a covenant—a contract—between god and man.



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<sup>9</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.

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ON GOSHO PASSAGES

Reverend Raido Hirota  
Bucks County, Pennsylvania  
June 2012

**QUESTION:** What does the following gosho passage from the “Mongol Envoys” mean? “Ultimately, all phenomena are contained within one’s life, down to the last particle of dust. The nine mountains and the eight seas are encompassed by one’s body; the sun, moon and myriad stars are contained within one’s mind.”

**RH:**The life of Namumyōhōrengekyō inside our own lives has a relationship with all phenomena in Nature. Thus, the sun, moon and myriad stars are all inside one’s life.

**B3:** I understand that all life is Namumyōhōrengekyō and comes from Namumyōhōrengekyō, but could you explain this further? Can you expand on your answer?

**RH:**Human beings think that human life is above everything. Humans believe in human superiority—that they are superior to all other creatures. However, there is no other life that is more dependent and supported by all other life than human life. In Christianity they teach that only God is above human beings. In Buddhism everything is equal. Human beings just happen to be born as human beings, and we are equal to all other creatures. There are many among us who think we should care about nature. But actually human beings are nature itself. The sun, the moon, the stars, all of these are inside of us within our

mind. And without them we cannot exist. That is what Buddha taught. This relationship between all things is called Namumyōhōrengekyō.

**B3:** The Buddha said that the sun, moon, and stars are contained within our mind, but in thinking how this earth and how all physical things come into existence—for instance, the planet was formed by asteroids and space debris—collapsed stars, planet, etc.—colliding together. And then we came out of the earth of this planet—everything arose from that. So is this what is also meant? We are the stars, the sun, and the moon? The grass is also? Isn’t this dynamic of planet formation and life formation the actions of Namumyōhōrengekyō?

**RH:**In Christianity they say that god created the world. Buddhism does not teach that god created the world. Buddha did not create the world. And Namumyōhōrengekyō did not create the world. But Namumyōhōrengekyō is the reason—the cause—for the world’s existence. The order of events that brought about the creation of this world, that is what happened first, what happened second, what happened third, doesn’t matter. It’s all included in the cause or reason which is Namumyōhōrengekyō. Namumyōhōrengekyō is the reason why this planet exists.

**B3:** So the sun and moon and stars are a part of us because it's all

Namumyōhōrengekyō.

**RH:** That's absolutely right.

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**QUESTION:** What is the meaning of the phrase “the eight cold hells that result from our covetousness and greed,” from the “The One –Eyed Turtle and Floating Sandalwood Log”?

**RH:** The hells mentioned here are where people go who care only for their own wellbeing, and not for others. For example, people who steal the clothes of others, or who get warmth even to the degree of feeling hot, while seeing that their parents and teachers are freezing.

It is also explained in Buddhism that there are eight hot hells. The worse of these is *Muken-jigoku*, the *Avichi* hell or the hell of incessant suffering. This hell is not for people who steal or who have committed

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**QUESTION:** The goshō often refers to the “City of Tranquil Light.” What is the “City of Tranquil Light”?

**RH:** It is where the Buddha is; the border to the state of becoming Buddha.

**B4:** Does the City of Tranquil Light mean the life condition of Buddhahood, or does it mean an abode or actual place that one is reincarnated into?

**RH:** The Lotus Sutra teaches that your world or life condition does not change in death. In Japan people believe that everyone becomes a Buddha when they die. But Nichiren Daishonin rejected that view. He did not believe that you attain Buddhahood at death. He believed and taught that if

some horrific crime against society. This is the hell in which people who did not correctly understand the Buddhist Law suffer. It is the worst of the worst of the eight hells where people suffer without relief. This is what the Buddha taught.

In Christianity they teach that when you go to hell that's it. That's the end. In Buddhism that is not the case. If you go to hell, it's not the end. Actually, going to hell in Buddhism provides an opportunity, or is a means for one to begin to understand Buddhism. It then becomes a starting point for one's life to begin learning more about the Lotus Sutra. So going to hell in Buddhism is not the end. You still have more chances.

people followed the correct teaching, believed in the correct teaching and correctly practiced the correct teaching, they would realize Buddhahood while still alive. Tranquil, or Tranquil Light is a state that is very secure and calm. It is the state of Buddhahood. That state of being calm and peaceful, of being in the City of Tranquil Light can be achieved in our everyday lives. This condition is included in our daily practice of the Lotus Sutra if we practice it correctly and do not reject, object to, or misunderstand any teaching. If you merge with the Lotus Sutra, you will experience this City of Tranquil Light—the state of Buddhahood.

Using an analogy, to prepare for an examination one studies hard. If you study and prepare for the exam, you will take the

exam with a more peaceful and calm mind. You won't be desperate or anxious or have any trepidation because you've prepared well. So think of the examination as death. Towards the end of your life you do not have to experience a sense of anxiety or

desperation if you lived your life with the Lotus Sutra, practicing and believing in it in the right way throughout your life. You are prepared. That is how you must live with Namumyōhōrengekyō in your life.

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## THE DIFFICULTY OF FOLLOWING AND PRACTICING THE TRUE LAW

Reverend Raido Hirota  
Bucks County, Pennsylvania  
June 2012

**QUESTION:** Nichiren Shu<sup>10</sup> says that Nikko Shonin was not the true successor of Nichiren Daishonin because the transfer document Taiseikiji claims as proof is only a reproduction. There is no original document, and Nikkō<sup>11</sup> never said that he was the successor. Can you clarify?

**RH:**The claim of Nichiren Shu is a lie. After Nichiren had passed away, Nikko continued his deep faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō, and tried to persuade his fellow followers of Nichiren, who were changing their belief to Shakyamuni<sup>12</sup>, to continue their faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō. Despite Nikko

Shonin's effort, the landlord of Minobu<sup>13</sup> completely changed his belief, as did so many other former believers of Namumyōhōrengekyō. So, Nikkō decided to leave Minobu, and upon leaving left a letter which states:

*I really regret that I have to leave Minobu. But I have decided that the most important thing is to keep Nichiren's Law and pass it down to future generations. Since others are changing their belief to Shakyamuni, I am the one who truly understands what Nichiren had taught us: Believe in the Law, not a person.*

In this age of massive information accessibility worldwide, we have to judge if the information is right or wrong. If you are the kind of person who easily believes the claim of Nichiren Shu without giving it any

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<sup>10</sup> Nichiren Shu - a sect of Nichiren Buddhism that chants Namumyōhōrengekyō, believes and worships Shakyamuni as the true Buddha.

<sup>11</sup> Nikkō - Nikkō Shonin - (1246-1333) 2<sup>nd</sup> High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu who received the transfer of the teachings directly from Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>12</sup> Shakyamuni - Shakyamuni Buddha - Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 BCE-949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism in this world.

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<sup>13</sup> Landlord of Minobu - Hakiri Sanenaga, who was a follower of Nichiren Daishonin and the steward of the Mt. Minobu area where Nichiren Daishonin had his headquarters. But after the Daishonin's death Hakiri committed many slanders against the Daishonin's religion.



deep thought, then you will have a hard time being a true believer of the Law itself, as there will be many challenges to test the strength of your belief. If you can't make a correct judgment, you will easily become a slanderer and end up in hell. Nikko Shonin wasn't in a battle to gain the status of being the only successor of Nichiren. It was other followers who changed their belief after the death of Nichiren. In the age of Mappo<sup>14</sup>, Shakyamuni is the provisional Buddha (shakubutsu) and Nichiren is the true Buddha (honbutsu) who has the power and ability to save others. The belief of Nikko, who succeeded Nichiren, is in the Law, not a person—Shakyamuni, for example.

**B3:** You've states the fundamental difference between Nichiren Shoshu and Nichiren Shu. Some people who have left the Soka Gakkai, which was in the Nichiren Shoshu tradition, have gone to Nichiren Shu. I guess that is a part of being tested in faith. The interesting phrase is "being tested." We are always being tested. There are many different ways of being tested. Trying to maintain the correct path—the correct teachings is difficult. Can you comment?

**RH:** Before Nichiren passed away he appointed six senior priests<sup>15</sup> as his major disciples. These priests were very intelligent and had exemplary practices. The six priests were each born and raised in different locales, and under different conditions. They had different personalities and characters and had different skills. Each joined Nichiren at different times. They each belonged to different sects of Buddhism before joining Nichiren, so they

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<sup>14</sup> Mappo – the Latter Day of the Law which began 2000 years after the death of Shakyamuni, or 1052 CE,

<sup>15</sup> Six senior priests – Nisshō, Nichirō, Nikkō, Nikō, Nitchō and Nichiji.

each came to Nichiren with different sets of beliefs. However, these six lived with Nichiren, practiced together, and formed the same beliefs.

When Nichiren was alive he was treated as a criminal because he opposed the Shogunate government<sup>16</sup>. Nichiren was almost killed by the Shogunate, and his followers were also targets of assassination. Just before he passed away he assigned these six priests to return to their places of birth as missionaries to teach this religion to their people. Nichiren depended on these six senior disciples to spread his teachings. Nonetheless, five out of six found it difficult to oppose the government. So they returned to their former beliefs which was also the beliefs the government held, that Buddha is the object of worship—Buddha = honzon. That was not Nichiren's belief, and was in fact against Nichiren's belief. Of the six, it was only Nikkō Shonin who did not change his beliefs. He held firm to Nichiren's belief.

**B3:** So five senior priests changed their belief due to pressure from the government?

**RH:** Some of them changed their belief because of government pressure. Some returned to their former beliefs because they felt they were in danger. So they changed their beliefs to save themselves.

It is very difficult to live with and practice the Lotus Sutra correctly. As these historical facts exemplify and as Nichiren's own life shows us, we are on trial—we are always being tested. It is very difficult to hold on to your beliefs—to live together with the Lotus Sutra, holding on to the correct belief, and living in the right way. We must practice the way Nikkō Shonin did.

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<sup>16</sup> Shogunate government – a feudal government ruled by a warlord or shogun.

Out of the six senior priests, Nikkō was the only one who tried to hold fast to Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. That is how we should live and practice this religion. The only proof of how you are living is to determine whether you are living your life like Nikkō Shonin.

**B3:** What do you mean by having your belief and having the correct belief in Nichiren Daishonin? That seems contradictory.

**RH:** Even if human beings believe that something is logical and makes sense, if you feel your life is in danger or that you are

targeted because your belief doesn't conform to that of the authority, , like the five out of six priests, then you might naturally feel the disadvantage of what you believe in and may want to change your beliefs. That's naturally how human beings are. But at the same time, you have to live with the Lotus Sutra. You have to take it into your life and live like Nikkō Shonin. That's the heart of practicing this religion. So no matter what your thoughts are, and how you process things, you have to hold on to the correct beliefs, stick with the true and correct religion, and try to practice in the right way, the way that Nikkō Shonin did.

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**QUESTION:** To practice Buddhism correctly one must follow the Buddha's Law and not the opinions of others nor one's own mind. How do we discern whether we are following the Law and not our own mind?

**RH:** I bet you know what you are doing; whether you are following the Law or your own mind.

**B3:** Some people think they're following the Law, but they aren't actually. They aren't able to discern it, or realize it. They're blocking it. For someone like that, how do they see what the correct thinking is and whether they are following the Law, or whether they are following their own thoughts, or somebody else's thoughts?

**RH:** In Christianity the law equals what Jesus Christ taught. The teachings of Jesus

**B3:** In order to follow the Buddha's teaching correctly you have to constantly

Christ = the law. The words of the preacher equal the law. That is to say, the words that came from the mouth of a human being are the law. But if you discover that  $1+1=2$ , you did not create that formula because it is universal logic. It did not originate with you. It already existed. We realize what is advantageous or disadvantageous, more profitable or less profitable to us. We realize when we put our personal interests in the center of our life and not the correct Law. And we know when we are living with thoughts of our own interests—what's good for us, what's bad for us; what's to our personal advantage or disadvantage, more profitable to us or less profitable.

**B3:** So when you're doing that you can't follow the Buddha's teaching correctly. Is that correct?

**RH:** You're right. fight the inclination to follow the path that is profitable or advantageous for yourself?

**RH:** Yes, you're very right.

Some priests, whether they are Buddhist priests (Nichiren Shoshu, Shoshinka<sup>17</sup> or other Buddhist sects) or Christian priests or clergy, Jewish rabbis, or Moslem imams, they also put their own thoughts in the center of their lives and do not practice their respective religions in the right way, because they are putting their own interests above the religion that they are practicing. The followers or believers must develop a keen eye to see the clergy who practice in the wrong way and preach in the wrong way and act in another way. Believers cannot follow everything blindly. For example, there are some sects that preach mass suicide. These sects are not teaching correct beliefs to the people. There are also venerable priests or clergy who are widely regarded. If these priests or clergy are always preaching thoughts, beliefs or ideas different from their religion's tenets, then they are not practicing their religion in the correct way.

**B3:** What are the correct thoughts we should have when practicing this religion?

**RH:** You must understand the basic Law, and you need to learn the infrastructure of the Laws. Moreover, you must not just blindly swallow and digest my words. You must check to see if my words abide by the Laws of Buddhism. The worst religious leaders are those who say, "Whatever I say equals the Law. My words equal the Law."

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## GOSHO SELECTION

### THE DIFFICULTY OF SUSTAINING FAITH<sup>18</sup>

About the difficulty of sustaining faith in this sutra: According to Nisshō<sup>19</sup>, you said to him, "I have been practicing this sutra correctly since last year, when you told me that those who embrace this sutra will enjoy peace and security in this life and good circumstances in the next. But instead I have been deluged by hardships." Is this true, or did he give me a false report? In either case, I will take advantage of this opportunity to resolve any doubts you may have.

A passage from the Lotus Sutra reads, "...difficult to believe and difficult to understand."<sup>20</sup> Many hear about and accept this sutra, but few continue their faith in the face of great obstacles. To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who embrace this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties. It is certain, however, that they

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<sup>17</sup> Shoshin-kai – the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.

<sup>18</sup> *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 1, p127

<sup>19</sup> Nisshō – (1221-1323) – one of the six close disciples of Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>20</sup> Lotus Sutra chapter 10.

will "quickly" obtain the supreme enlightenment." To "sustain faith" means to cherish Namumyōhōrengekyō, the teaching by which all Buddhas throughout past, present and future attain enlightenment. A sutra reads, "We will uphold what the Buddha has entrusted to us." The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai<sup>21</sup> stated, "One accepts out of the power of faith and continues because of the power of prayer." Another part of the sutra reads, "It is difficult to sustain faith in this sutra. One who embraces it even for a short time will delight me and all other Buddhas."

A fire burns higher when logs are added, and a strong wind makes the gura<sup>22</sup> swell. The boughs of the long-lived pine tree become bent and twisted as it grows older. The votary of the Lotus Sutra is like the fire and the gura, while his persecutions are like the logs and wind. The votary of the Lotus Sutra is the Buddha of eternal life; no wonder his practice is hindered, just as the pine tree's branches are bent or broken. From now on, you should always remember the words, "It is difficult to sustain faith in this sutra."

With my deep respect,  
Nichiren

The sixth day of the third month in the twelfth year of Bun'ei (1275)

Mar 6, 1275

To Shijo Kingo<sup>23</sup>



***The Middle Way***

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E-mail: [ufound@udumbarafoundation.org](mailto:ufound@udumbarafoundation.org)



Advisor: Reverend Raido Hirota

Founder and Editor-in-Chief: Peach Pair

**In this issue:** Translators: Jun Hokari and Misae Lucasey

Editor: Art Shapiro

<sup>21</sup> T'ien-t'ai – (538-597) made a theoretical categorization of Shakyamuni's teachings and founded a Chinese school of Buddhism which recognized the Lotus Sutra as a superior teaching.

<sup>22</sup> Gura – imaginary insects which swell rapidly in strong winds.

<sup>23</sup> Shijo Kingo – (1230-1300) – Shijo Nakatsukasa Saburo Zaemon-no-jo Yorimoto – a samurai who was a devout follower of Nichiren Daishonin.