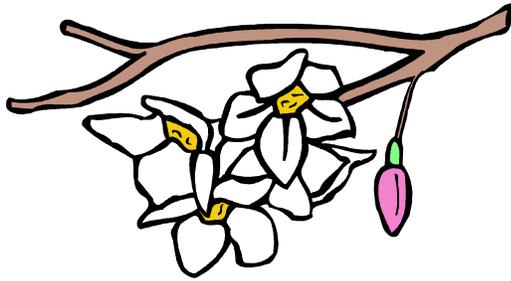


THE MIDDLE WAY[®]

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

AUTUMN

2010



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QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SHOTEN ZENJIN

Reverend Raido Hirota
East Stroudsburg, PA
June 2009

QUESTION: Why do we pray to the *Shoten Zenjin*¹ only once a day in the morning?

We pray to the *Shoten Zenjin* in the morning when the sun rises because it has been decided that that is the time for making an offering (*houmi*) to the *Shoten Zenjin*. *Houmi* means both to place some food as an offering and to pray (sometimes without placing food). For example, we place offerings such as fruit and rice for Gohonzon² but not for *Shoten Zenjin*, although the underlying concept, which is to make an offering, is the same. Of course, neither Gohonzon nor *Shoten Zenjin* actually eat our offerings, they take in our sincerity, or our mind of faith and respect.

At one time, Nichiren Shoshu³ used to do *houmi*, or the offering of prayer to the *Shoten Zenjin*, four times a day. Then we made the sun the symbol of the *Shoten Zenjin* and decided that the time for *houmi* for the *Shoten Zenjin* is in the morning, when the sun rises. Nowadays we pray to the *Shoten Zenjin* once a day in the morning before praying to Gohonzon to thank them for protecting the people who keep the

¹ Shoten Zenjin – Buddhist gods – they are occurrences that are not humanly possible, can't be seen and are not scientifically explained. They are inexplicable phenomena that occur.

² Gohonzon – the scroll that is the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, representing the universal Law of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo and the Buddha nature in all things.

³ Nichiren Shoshu – the Buddhist religion that embraces and recites the true Law of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo as the original cause of enlightenment, and believes in Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

practice of Lotus Sutra, and to remind them not to forget or neglect their duty to protect us.

You may wonder why we pray to the *Shoten Zenjin* before we pray to Gohonzon, when the Gohonzon is fundamental to our belief. It is because our prayer calls on the *Shoten Zenjin* to join us and do the practice of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo⁴ together with us.

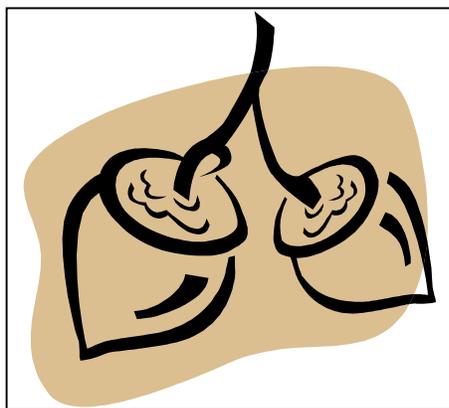
Do you think praying to the *Shoten Zenjin* is important, and praying only once a day is not enough because the *Shoten Zenjin* protects you? The responsibility and the mission of the *Shoten Zenjin* are to protect those who do the correct practice of the Lotus Sutra.⁵ If you are not a practitioner of Lotus Sutra, the *Shoten Zenjin* have no responsibility nor duty to protect you. The *Shoten Zenjin* always protect those who do the practice of the Lotus Sutra for the sake of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. As long as you do the correct practice of the Lotus Sutra and obey the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, the *Shoten Zenjin* will protect you throughout the day.

The *Shoten Zenjin* have the power to see who is a practitioner of Lotus Sutra and who is not. People from the Soka Gakkai⁶ sometimes speak ill of others in order to protect their group, not the Law of the Lotus Sutra. As long as you remain true to the Law of the Lotus Sutra, you don't have to be confused by what people of the Soka Gakkai say to you.

QUESTION: In the goshō “Why no Protection from the Heavenly Gods,” Daishonin said, “All affairs will come to a conclusion in the pure land of Eagle Peak.”⁷ What does he mean by that?

RH: When the Buddha preached the sutra it was witnessed by the entire congregation and all the *shoten zenjin*. The presence of the *shoten zenjin* is proof that the *shoten zenjin* will protect all practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. Daishonin said it is not me who said this, I, Nichiren did not conjure this up, it is written in the sutra. Eagle Peak symbolizes enlightenment. Once you become enlightened you will understand this.

Nichiren Daishonin's basic teaching is that we need to put the Law in the center and not the word of human beings, because the words of human beings can often change. So we should always put the Law in the center.



⁴ Namu-myoho-renge-kyo – the Mystic Law; the ultimate Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

⁵ Lotus Sutra – the highest teaching of 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.

⁶ Soka Gakkai – SGI – a lay organization that wrongly uses some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism in its own philosophy and practice.

⁷ Eagle Peak – symbolizes the Buddha land or Buddhahood.

THREE BODIES OF THE BUDDHA

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June 2009

QUESTION: It says in the goshō⁸ “The Three Kinds of Treasure,” “When the Buddha nature continuously manifests itself, it will quickly extinguish illusions and reveal the property-of-Law aspect of life.” Please explain the property-of-Law aspect of life?

Reverend Hirota (RH): *Hosshin* (the property of Law aspect of life) is the Law itself and comes between *Ōjin* and *Hōshin*. *Hosshin* is the truth. According to its Chinese characters, it indicates the Law-body. It is the truth that Buddha realized, which is *Namu-myoho-rence-kyo*.

The three bodies of the Buddha (Jap. *Sanjin*) are *Hosshin*, which, as I said, represents the Law or truth of the Buddha; *Hōjin* or *Hōshin* represents the Buddha’s wisdom; and *Ōjin* represents the physical existence of Buddha. *Dainichi Buddha*⁹ symbolizes the truth-body, which is *Hosshin*. If you only follow *Dainichi Buddha* you will not be able to see the other two bodies. *Ōjin*, the physical existence of Buddha, is symbolized by *Shakyamuni Buddha*. But if you focus on *Shakyamuni Buddha*¹⁰ you will not see the truth-body. So as you can see, there needs to be something that connects the bodies. That is why there is *Hōjin* (*Hōshin*)—the wisdom-body—which allows you to realize that there can also be the other two bodies—the truth-body and the manifest or existence-body—at the same time.

When you teach people only about *Shakyamuni Buddha* who represents the manifest or existence body of Buddha, or *Dainichi* who represents the Law or truth body of Buddha, you are teaching them only about a single aspect of the Buddha’s life. Thus people wrongly believe that each Buddha has a different property, or was a different type of Buddha. In order to bring people to a correct understanding of all the properties of Buddha you must teach them about the wisdom-body. That is the meaning of the phrases in the third silent prayer of *gongyo*¹¹ *isshin soku sanjin, sanjin soku isshin*,—a single Buddha possesses all three bodies or properties, three bodies or properties are all found within a single Buddha.

The Law or truth-body should actually be invisible [because it is a non-physical state]. But people wanted a representation of the truth-body of the Buddha, so they made a statue of *Dainichi Buddha* to represent this body. In reality, having *Dainichi Buddha* as the truth body is nonsense. The truth or Law-body, which represents what the Buddha is enlightened to, should be invisible.

The existence or manifest-body is represented by *Shakyamuni*. When people worship *Shakyamuni*, they forget about the real teaching of the Buddha, which is the Law of *Namu-myoho-rence-kyo*. People only focus on a statue or the physical existence of Buddha. Sects, other than *Nichiren Shoshu*, which chant *Namu-myoho-rence-kyo* and believe in the Lotus Sutra, follow the word – *Namu-myoho-rence-kyo* – and believe it is great because *Shakyamuni Buddha* taught it. Regrettably,

⁸ Goshō – sacred writings of *Nichiren Daishonin*.

⁹ *Dainichi Buddha* – a Buddha of the esoteric teachings who, it is said, is always in this world teaching the Law.

¹⁰ *Shakyamuni Buddha* – *Siddhartha Gautama Buddha* (1029 BCE – 949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism.

¹¹ *Gongyo* – the practice of *Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism* which entails the morning and evening recitation of the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting *Namu-myoho-rence-kyo*.

they don't understand the truth of the sutra. They appear to be following the same sutra as we do, but their practice is different than ours.

THE AFFECT OF DAIMOKU ON OTHERS

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June 2009

QUESTION: My daimoku¹² calls forth the Buddha in me. Can it call forth the Buddha in others?

RH: Yes it can.

Believer 1 (B1): What is the difference when we pray for the enlightenment of someone who is deceased, and when we pray for someone we know who is alive? How does our affect on someone else's enlightenment differ from when someone is alive and when someone is not alive?

RH: This is related to the Phantom City discussion in the last newsletter. If you don't practice *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* and reach enlightenment while you are alive, there is no way you can become enlightened after death. Going from life to death doesn't mean going from this world into the Pure Land of Heavenly Bliss in the western region. Going from life to death is just a continuation of the life flow. In Nichiren Daishonin's¹³ Buddhism a person should realize enlightenment in this life. Everyone has the life of Buddha within them. But unless you realize it, it is the same as not having it at all. For example, when someone close to us passes away, and that person did not believe in the Lotus Sutra, our prayers—our gongyo and daimoku—cannot lead them to enlightenment because the person no longer has life. But we can still pray for the person's next life, after he or she is reborn and will have a new life in which to accept *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*.

It is impossible to lead dead people to enlightenment through prayer. It is also difficult to lead animals and plants or infants who are not mature enough to understand the teaching of Buddha. Yet we should pray for them—we pray that they form a connection or relationship with Buddha's Law. Whether a person follows the Law of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* or opposes the Law, the important thing is having made a connection of some kind to the Law. Even if the person scorns the Buddha's Law, the person has still made a connection to the Law through hatred. It's a reverse relationship; but it is still a relationship. The person may go to hell, but hell in Buddhism is not a place of permanent punishment. In Christianity, if you go to hell you are eternally damned. But in Buddhism the world of hell is not a place of eternal punishment or eternal torture. It is an opportunity through agony to come to the realization that *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* is the way to reach enlightenment. And in the next life after

¹² Daimoku – Odaimoku – chanting *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

¹³ Nichiren Daishonin – (122-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Law of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

rebirth the individual will be able to encounter *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* and endeavor to realize enlightenment.

It is said that Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism can even lead weeds or trees to enlightenment. Daishonin himself says that everyone can realize enlightenment. Of course, the essential thing is to establish a relation with the Buddha's Law. But if you reject the Buddha's Law, of course you will not become enlightened. The crucial thing is the individual's will. The individual must choose whether he or she follows *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* or not.

As for myself, even if I am having a difficult time, when I do gongyo and daimoku I feel happy. I feel grateful for being able to practice *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*. I can't tell you why that is. But that is how I feel. When I feel that gratitude, I realize that the life of Buddha is living inside me. The feeling of gratitude does not last forever. I get confused sometimes. When I get up in the morning I do gongyo, and in the evening I do gongyo again. Sometimes it's really joyful, and sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's really painful. It's always like that. You cannot stay in a state of perfection. Even after you realize enlightenment, you will still fluctuate. You will continue to go up and down.

ON MIRACLES

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June 2009

QUESTION: When Nichiren Daishonin died on 10/13/1282, cherry blossoms bloomed unseasonably. When the Daishonin was about to be beheaded at Tatsunokuchi on 9/12/1271, a comet appeared in the sky preventing his execution. In the Christian religion, god allegedly performed so-called "miracles", such as changing water into wine, curing leprosy, and raising himself from death back to life. How are the cherry blossoms blooming in October and the comet in the sky different from these "so called" Christian "miracles"?

RH: Legends of miracles in the Daishonin's Buddhism are not the same as the miracles in Christianity. In Christianity there are stories which describe how great god and Christ are, and that praise god and Christ. The purpose of stories such as Noah's Ark, the Virgin Mary giving birth to Christ, or Adam and Eve is to praise god's greatness. By contrast, the purpose of the miracles which Daishonin relayed is to emphasize the importance of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*. Of course there are some tales, or some children's stories. These were meant to lead children and uneducated people to the practice. Some of the stories relating to Nichiren Daishonin were created subsequent to Daishonin's death by individuals who wanted to relay the import and wonder of *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo*.

B2: What's the difference between god and Nichiren Daishonin? I don't really understand.

RH: The purpose of the stories in the Christian, Judaic, and Islamic religions are to show the greatness of god, who is the creator of this world. By contrast, first and foremost no stories say that Buddha created the world. The stories of Buddhism convey what the Law of Buddha is and how to follow the Buddha's Law. There are many miracle stories in other religions as well as in Buddhism. But the difference between the stories lies in their purpose. The purpose of most other religions is to

show the greatness of a deity—god the creator—while here in true Buddhism the main purpose is to describe the Law.

Regarding the story of the cherry blossoms blooming out of season, not only did believers at the time witness this event, people from other denominations also reported that the event occurred. So this story, I believe, was a true and verifiable event.

There is a species of fish in Japan called sea bream (red porgy) which is red in color. It is regarded as a symbol of fortune in the Japanese culture. It is said that when Nichiren Daishonin was born in a small fishing village in eastern Japan, the sea bream, though they are deep water fish, came to the surface near the shores of this village. People regarded it as a sign of fortune. Even today, sea bream fishing is prohibited in this Chiba Prefecture area, not by law, but rather by custom because people believe the fish to be sacred. If this were a false story, the custom would not have survived until today. So that story was also true. But as believers, we do not believe in the Lotus Sutra because of the miracle stories. We believe in the Lotus Sutra because of the Law.

Mount Minobu is a mountain in eastern Japan where Nichiren Daishonin settled after years of exile on Sado Island.¹⁴ Today it is one of the most sacred places of the Nichiren Shu sect.¹⁵ The Nichiren Shu sect of Minobu places a strong emphasis on miracle stories. Minobu Mountain is somewhat steep. Nowadays they have a tram that transits from the base of the mountain to the summit. When Nichiren Daishonin lived there he was already aged and in poor health. Legend has it that the Daishonin, in his frail condition, climbed the mountain from the base to the summit every single morning to pray facing east towards his hometown. To me this sounds impossible for an infirmed older man to climb to the summit every single day. I think the reason this story has persisted for so long is because it is an interesting tale to tell as sightseers ride up the mountain in the tram. Of course, this is not the only reason the story continues today, but it is one of the reasons.

B3: Is this story true?

RH: No, it is not true.

B4: If someone came up to you and said god is more important than Buddha, what answer could you give that person that would stop their conversation in its tracks?

B3: What is the difference between Buddha and god?

B4: For me, when someone comes at you and says, well you don't believe in god, my own view is, why should I. You're free to choose what you believe.

RH: In other religions the laws belong to god the creator. They are god's laws. He dominates and controls the laws. In terms of the Buddha's Law, we equally share the Law. There's no creator. The world was created through links or connections of lives. No one controls our world. We are all responsible for it. But even some Buddhists misunderstand this and create a creationist story, saying the world was created by Buddha.

¹⁴ Sado Island – a remote island off the Japan Sea where Nichiren Daishonin was banished from Oct. 10, 1271-March 13, 1274.

¹⁵ Nichiren Shu – a sect of Nichiren Buddhism that chants Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, but believes Shakyamuni is the true Buddha.

B2: Christianity and Buddhism worship differently and believe in different things. God vs. the Law. But their sufferings are the same. We all go through the same sufferings.

B4: A professor of Christian theology said that people are inherently evil and must accept Christ in their lives in order to become good, while Buddhism professes that people are inherently good because at the core of everything is Buddha-nature. With these different views as the basis of belief, the way that you deal with people is completely different.

Non-Believer: Christianity says that people were all created as good, but there is the element of sin. So we also inherited sin. So sin put a blemish on our perfection. That's why we suffer.

RH: In Buddhism we also recognize that human beings have both good and evil aspects. Buddhism also admits that the evil side of human beings still exists even after enlightenment. You cannot extinguish your evil side by practicing Buddhism. You cannot kill some part of yourself. But you can reduce the evil side of yourself and expand your good side. This can be done to a lesser degree without Buddhism through mental discipline—thinking positively and with volition (willing it). But that's not strong enough. In order to truly lessen our evil nature and expand our good, we need to realize a greater entity, which is the Buddha's Law.

Because we don't really know the ancestral lineage of our species, we therefore don't know where we come from. We could be related to monkeys, to apes or to Adam Eve who were created from soil. Because Christianity adopted the theory of Adam and Eve, who were created by the creator, they don't admit or recognize other theories such as evolution. But from the point of view of Buddhism, we recognize that we cannot exclude different opinions. That's why in Buddhism we don't have a history of episodes such as the "witch hunts."

B5: Do we recognize that there may be truth to other theories, including the possibility of Adam and Eve or evolution? Are we not passing judgment, saying it didn't exist? Or are we saying that there's a possibility that it did occur?

RH: The teachings of Buddhism do not give any credence to the creation story. We believe that life is eternal. Matter was already there—it already existed. There was a Law before there was human life. Personally, I think the theory of evolution is much more reliable than the story of Adam and Eve, where people were sculpted from soil.

According to Nichiren Shoshu teachings, god did not create the Law. The Law existed before any gods or deities. The teaching of Buddhism explains that there was the Law before there was Buddha.

Even within Nichiren Shoshu there is a ridiculous miracle story. One day Nichiren Daishonin had a toothache, and his tooth came out. When he looked at the tooth there was a piece of flesh attached to it. As time passed, and this story got passed on, the piece of flesh expanded and covered the whole tooth. The flesh took on meaning and came to display how the sect was doing. As the number of believers increased, the flesh grew bigger and bigger. When the number of believers diminished, the flesh shrank. I wrote a thesis on this subject a few years ago, putting forth the idea that the miracle tooth story, which isn't true, is debasing the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, and that we must stop telling that story. I sent my thesis to Nichiren Shoshu. To this day I have not had a reply.

KE, KU, CHU
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June 2009

QUESTION: The Void (*ku*) is the ultimate reality in most Buddhisms. However, our Buddhism says that the ultimate reality is the Middle Way (*chu*) – Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. Our Buddhism explains that *ku* (the void), *ke* (temporary existence) and *chu* (the Middle Way) are at all times interconnected. Can you explain the difference between our view and the view held by other Buddhisms?

RH: *Ku* means that every life will disappear. *Ke* means that all life is *ku* and existence is temporary. That we are living right now is due to causes and relations. All teachings before the Lotus Sutra preached that *ku* was the absolute truth. But chapter 6 of the Lotus Sutra teaches that *ku* is a truth, and *ke* is also a truth. Any teaching professing that only *ku* is true or only *ke* is true is wrong. *Chu* is the Middle Way. It means that all life is *ku* and *ke*; it is not *ku*, or *ke* alone. *Ku*, *ke*, *chu* – these three are one. One existence has these three aspects. That is life.

B6: *Ku* and *ke* seem very similar. *Ku* means it will disappear; *ke* means it's temporary. So temporary and disappear seem very similar. And *chu* just seems like a combination of two things that are almost the same. So this is not really very clear.

RH: *Ke* is temporary existence. It is life here, which is temporary. After this life it is uncertain where we go. That uncertainty is *ku*, the void. In the sutras taught before the Lotus Sutra the focus is only on *ku*. Those sutras taught that this life was meaningless; one should forget about focusing on this life. The Lotus Sutra, to the contrary, teaches that things in this life are also the truth. You cannot ignore this fact. So the concept of *chu* means that *ku* includes *ke* and *ke* includes *ku* at the same time. That is how life is.

B7: So if *ku* includes *ke* and *ke* includes *ku*, what do we say about *chu*?

RH: Before the Lotus Sutra religions taught that *ku* is *ku* and *ke* is *ke*. They were separate. For example, take your life in this existence. Your existence in terms of the concept of *ku* is vague. It means nothing, or has no meaning. So you should not focus on your life in this existence. This is the teaching taught in religions that preceded the Lotus Sutra. Life here is just an illusion. It is meaningless.

The teaching of the Lotus Sutra is completely different. It teaches that this life, this existence, is a truth, and death and the life hereafter is also a truth. In other words, according to the Lotus Sutra, life here on earth is temporary existence and is true, as is the void, or life after death true. Before the Lotus Sutra these two concepts were not at all related. If you accepted one concept, the other was negated. Only one concept could be true. *Ku* and *ke* could not both be true. In order for these two concepts—*ku*

and *ke*—to be simultaneous realities T'ien-t'ai,¹⁶ after a thorough analysis of the Lotus Sutra, introduced the concept of *chu*. The concept of *chu* is equivalent to the concept of zero. The integer zero could be the end of numbers, while at the same time it could be the beginning of numbers (+1, 0, -1).

The Lotus Sutra teaches that disappearing does not mean the end. Similarly, *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* teaches eternal life. What this means is that there isn't an end to life. Life continues forever. So we cannot make light of this life here. According to this teaching we also need to focus on this life. We need to take care of it and cherish it. Cherishing this life also means taking good care of the next life as well.

B1: Could it be simplified? Take the esoteric Buddhist or a Mahayana belief that focuses on *ku*. As you say, life is an illusion. They overly focus on that illusory aspect of life. So in a way, is the concept of *chu* actually saying that life is both an illusion and a truth at the same time? Would that be an easier way to explain it? *Ku* is an escape at the expense of focusing on the reality here. The temporary existence here, or *ke*—that is obviously not permanent. *Chu* is sort of saying you're doing both at the same time?

B5: Isn't that *ke* is a reality—this temporary existence is a reality—and that non-existence (*ku*) is a reality? It is not that *ke* is a reality and is also an illusion, and non-existence (*ku*) is also a reality. What unites them is *chu*. That is the nexus, the Middle Way. That is the continuum. That is what makes both realities.

B6: The other aspect is, before the Lotus Sutra / after the Lotus Sutra. There's a philosophical perception. What you have to remember is the philosophical difference between before the Lotus Sutra and after the Lotus Sutra. After the Lotus Sutra all life is equal. Therefore you can say that extends to existence and non-existence. They are fundamentally the same. That's post-Lotus Sutra thinking.

B5: So there's no difference between *ku* and *ke* because if there is a continuum *chu* permeates it all. *Chu* is the Law.

B1: I don't think that *ku* is non-existence.

B6: Void

B7: Can you say that *chu* is Buddha? That *chu*, the Middle Way is Buddha? That is the thing that holds throughout?

RH: *Chu* is not about Buddha. *Chu* is the Law of this world; it is the order of this world.

This may seem like a sidetrack, but at Taisekiji temple there is the *honzon* of *honzons*, or the Dai-Gohonzon. As you know, the Dai-Gohonzon is a physical or material thing. As time passes, the Dai-Gohonzon will age, deteriorate and even perish someday. But the people of Taisekiji temple insist that the Dai-Gohonzon is ultimate existence. They believe the Dai-Gohonzon could not possibly decay and perish; that it will never disappear, and that it will last forever on this earth. What they say is that even if there is an explosion next to it or a volcano—Mt. Fuji—erupts, the Dai-Gohonzon will not be

¹⁶ 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.

destroyed. It will not disappear. Moreover, they believe that people who doubt their theory are non-believers.

Of course, we need to cherish Gohonzon in our lives. But even if Gohonzon deteriorates and disappears, it doesn't mean that the Law of Buddha disappears. It does not mean that the Law of Namu-myoho-enge-kyo disappears. As life is limited, so is the physical existence of Gohonzon. But the idea, concept, and spirit of the Law of Gohonzon remain. The spirit of Gohonzon can never perish.

This is similar to our discussion of *ke, ku, chu*. I want you to realize that when you cherish and worship Gohonzon, you are seeking the spirit of Gohonzon—the idea of Gohonzon, which is the Law of Buddha.

GOSHO SELECTION

Excerpt

“Hell And Buddhahood”

...."The good fortune of the believer cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water." How reassuring!

You may think of hell, the iron rods of the guards of hell or the rending cries of Aborasetsu¹⁷ as existing way off in some faraway place, but they are not like that. This teaching is of prime importance, and yet I will impart it to you just as Bodhisattva Monju¹⁸ revealed to the Dragon King's daughter¹⁹ the secret teaching of *sokushin jobutsu*, that one can attain Buddhahood as a common mortal. Now that you are about to receive that teaching, strive even more earnestly in your faith. One who practices still more earnestly whenever he hears the teachings of the Lotus Sutra is a true seeker of the Way. When T'ien-t'ai stated, "From the indigo, an even deeper blue," he meant that something dyed with indigo becomes even bluer than the indigo plant itself. For us the Lotus Sutra is the indigo plant, and the growing intensity of our practice is "an even deeper blue."

The word *jigoku* or "hell" can be interpreted to mean digging a hole in the ground. A hole is always dug for one who dies; that is what is called "hell." The flames that reduce his body to ashes are the fires of incessant suffering. His wife, children and relatives hurrying the dead man to his grave are the guards of hell called Aborasetsu. The plaintive cries of his family are the voices of the guards of hell. The meter-long walking stick of the dead man is the iron rod of torture in hell. The horses and oxen that carry the deceased are the horse-headed and ox-headed demons, and the grave itself is the hell of incessant suffering. The eighty-four thousand earthly desires are eighty-four thousand cauldrons for torturing the dead. The dead man leaving his home is departing on a journey to the mountain of

¹⁷ Aborasetsu – the jailers in hell who have the head of an ox and hands of human beings, who are said to cut down evil doers with razor-sharp swords.

¹⁸ Bodhisattva Monju – leader of the bodhisattvas of the theoretical teachings.

¹⁹ 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 the Bodhisattva Monju preach the Lotus Sutra.

death, while the river beside which his loving children stand in grief is the river of three crossings. It is useless to look for hell anywhere else.

Those who embrace the Lotus Sutra, however, can change all this. For them, hell changes into the enlightened land, the burning fires of agony change into the torch of wisdom of the Buddha in his property-of-wisdom aspect; the dead person becomes a Buddha in his property-of-Law aspect; and the fiery inferno becomes the abode where the Buddha in his property-of-action aspect manifests his great mercy. Moreover, the walking stick is transformed into that of the true entity of the Mystic Law, the river of three crossings becomes the ocean of "sufferings are nirvana," and the mountain of death becomes the towering peak of "earthly desires are enlightenment." Please think of your husband in these terms. To realize all this is to open the inner eye of the Buddha wisdom. Devadatta²⁰ changed the hell of incessant suffering into the enlightened paradise, and the Dragon King's daughter also was able to attain enlightenment without changing her dragon form. The Lotus Sutra can bring enlightenment even to those who at first oppose it. Such great benefits are contained in the single character *myo*.

Bodhisattva Nagarjuna wrote, "[The Lotus Sutra is] like a great physician who changes poison into medicine." Miao-lo stated, "How can one find the eternal, enlightened land anywhere outside Buddh Gaya?²¹ This *saha* world²² does not exist outside the Buddha land." He also said, "The true entity is invariably revealed in all phenomena, and all phenomena invariably possess the Ten Factors.²³ The Ten Factors invariably function within the Ten Worlds²⁴, and the Ten Worlds invariably entail both life and its environment." The Lotus Sutra reads, "The true entity of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature...and their consistency from beginning to end." A passage from the *Juryo* chapter states, "The time is limitless and boundless...since I in fact attained Buddhahood." Here, "I" means all people in the Ten Worlds. All people of the Ten World inherently have in them the Buddha nature; so they dwell in the pure land. A passage from the *Hoben* chapter reads, "All phenomena are manifestations of the Law and are essentially external." Birth and death are the constant manifestations of eternal life continuing on through the past, present and future. This is nothing to regret or be surprised at. Even all the eight phases of a Buddha's existence are subject to the law of birth and death. The votaries of the Lotus Sutra are enlightened to all this, thereby attaining Buddhahood as common mortals. Since your deceased husband was a votary of this sutra, he doubtless attained enlightenment. You need not grieve so much over his passing. But to grieve is natural, as you are a common mortal. Even saints are sometimes saddened. Although Shakyamuni Buddha's greatest disciples realized the truth of life, they were human also and could not help lamenting his death.

By all means offer devoted prayers for your husband. The words of a wise priest, "Base your heart on the Ninth Consciousness²⁵ and your practice on the six consciousnesses,²⁶" are indeed well said. This letter contains one of Nichiren's most profound teachings. Keep it deep within your heart.

Respectfully,
Nichiren

The eleventh day of the seventh month
Reply to the wife of the late Lord Ueno

²⁰ Devadatta – a cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha who opposed the Buddha out of jealousy.

²¹ Buddh Gaya – the place where Shakyamuni realized enlightenment.

²² Saha world – this world, which is full of suffering.

²³ Ten Factors – the unchanging aspects of life that are common to all phenomena.

²⁴ Ten Worlds – ten conditions of life that are physically and spiritually manifest in a single entity.

²⁵ Ninth consciousness – the true entity of life.

²⁶ Six consciousnesses – sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and the perception of the five senses.



Oeshiki

Reverend Raido Hirota

October 13, 1282

Oeshiki is the most important ceremony in Nichiren Shoshu. The Daishonin's body, which is the same as our bodies, passed away at the age of 61 on the 12th day of the 10th month in the 5th year of *Koan* (1282). But the Buddha nature – the life of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo itself – never dies; it is eternal. That is why we celebrate Oeshiki, to affirm the eternal life of the Buddha.

At the time the Daishonin passed away the 12th day of the 10th month would have actually fallen at the end of November

instead of October. It was winter, yet the cherry blossoms bloomed throughout the country. Thus, for Oeshiki we make paper cherry blossoms and place them on either side of Gohonzon.

Happy Oeshiki!