

THE MIDDLE WAY[®]

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

SUMMER

2010

THEORETICAL TEACHINGS vs. ESSENTIAL TEACHINGS

Reverend Raido Hirota
East Stroudsburg, PA
June 2009

Believer 1 (B1): I have a question about the gosho¹ “Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation.”² In this gosho Daishonin³ is talking about the difference between *shikan*, which is the practice of concentration and insight established by T’ient-t’ai,⁴ and what the Daishonin means. When Daishonin talks about the difference between the theoretical teachings (*shakumon*) and the essential teachings (*honmon*) he says the theoretical teaching is too extensive. But he also says the essential teaching is too lofty. I don’t know if there was something wrong with the translation, but I found this to be very confusing. It seems that he’s saying the essential is too much for people and the theoretical is too limited. “T’ien-t’ai in his interpretation is saying that the reason that now, in the Middle Day of the Law,⁵ the practice to be carried out is this practice of observation of the mind, is that, if one were to attempt to approach the truth through the theoretical teaching, that teaching would prove too extensive in content, and if one were to attempt to approach it through the essential teaching,



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¹ Gosho – sacred writings of Nichiren Daishonin

² *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Vol II*, p. 509

³ Daishonin – Nichiren Daishonin (1222-1282) 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.

⁴ T’ien-t’ai – (538-597) the founder of a Chinese school of Buddhism who made a theoretical categorization of Shakyamuni’s teachings.

⁵ Middle Day of the Law – (*zoho*) the second of three time periods following Shakyamuni’s death (51CE-1052), when Buddhism becomes formalized and people’s connection to Buddhism begins to weaken.

that teaching would prove too lofty to ever be fully comprehended. Therefore these two approaches are not suitable to persons of shallow learning. Hence T'ien-t'ai is recommending that one simply concentrate on the observation of the mind whereby one may observe the wonderful Law within one's own mind or inner being."⁶ My basic question is what did the Daishonin take from the T'ien-t'ai teachings? Buddha nature is more deep and profound and cannot be understood on a simple level. Our practice is not something that you can simply read in a book and understand and then become enlightened. It's your whole life.

Reverend Raido Hirota (RH): In terms of the interpretation of the Lotus Sutra,⁷ T'ien-t'ai is the expert. T'ien-t'ai wrote three outstanding commentaries on the Lotus Sutra. They are *Hokke Mongu*,⁸ *Hokke Gengi*,⁹ and the *Maka Shikan*.¹⁰ The *Hokke Mongu* is a word by word analysis of the Lotus Sutra, similar to a dictionary. The *Hokke Gengi* explains the meaning of the Lotus Sutra. And the *Maka Shikan* explains how to practice the message in the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra has twenty-eight chapters. The first fourteen chapters are theoretical teachings and the latter fourteen are the essential teachings. The theoretical teachings explain what the Lotus Sutra is from Shakyamuni's¹¹ personal point of view based on his life. It's more narrative—story-like—so it seems easier to understand. In the essential teachings, Shakyamuni tried to turn the focus from the Buddha and worship of him as a deity, to concentration on the Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo instead. Shakyamuni himself said that the essential teachings are difficult to believe and difficult to understand.

Nichiren Daishonin looked upon and referred to T'ien-t'ai as a great analyst of the Lotus Sutra. However, he also said that T'ien-t'ai didn't practice the Lotus Sutra in the true way. Daishonin said the most important concept in T'ien-t'ai's analysis of the Lotus Sutra was *ichinen sanzen*¹² which he introduced in the *Maka Shikan*.

People tend to think that the Lotus Sutra is difficult to understand because the message in the Lotus Sutra—that you are equal to the Buddha, and that anyone and everyone can become Buddha someday—sounds too good to be true, or too good to believe. How is it possible that someone like me could possibly have the Buddha inside me, and can become Buddha? If you try to analyze the meaning of the Lotus Sutra theoretically, it would be difficult to understand. It would also not be easy to practice. But the actual message of the Lotus Sutra is not something so difficult to comprehend.

B1: That is why Daishonin said T'ien-t'ai practiced the theoretical teachings. It makes sense now.

RH: T'ien-t'ai taught the Lotus Sutra based on the theoretical teachings, and Nichiren Daishonin taught the Lotus Sutra based on the essential teachings. To round out the teachings, T'ien-t'ai included other teachings such as Zen¹³ and Shingon.¹⁴ Before Nichiren Daishonin crystallized his belief and formulated his teaching, he also practiced Zen and Shingon. But once Daishonin realized that the Lotus

⁶ *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, Vol. II*, p. 512

⁷ Lotus Sutra – the highest teaching taught by Shakyamuni, taught in the last eight years of his life. It reveals that all life has Buddha nature, and that the life of Buddha is eternal.

⁸ *Hokke Mongu – The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra*

⁹ *Hokke Gengi – The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*

¹⁰ *Maka Shikan – Great Concentration and Insight*

¹¹ Shakyamuni – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029-949 BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism.

¹² *Ichinen sanzen* – a single life moment contains three thousand realms of existence.

¹³ Zen – a sect that believes that enlightenment is achieved through meditation and the perception of one's own mind and not through doctrinal study.

¹⁴ Shingon – the true word sect that believes that enlightenment is achieved by chanting the secret words of Mahavairochana (Dainichi) Buddha.

Sutra is the only teaching that leads directly to enlightenment, he eliminated all other teachings and concentrated only on the Lotus Sutra.

The theory of *ichinen sanzen* states that human beings and other living things are related to each other and sustain each other. That's how we co-exist. Everything is equal. Everything has within it the life of Buddha. The Lotus Sutra is the only book that explains this theory. T'ien-t'ai had realized the theory of *ichinen sanzen* through the Lotus Sutra, but he wasn't certain of his own theories, so he really couldn't confirm it with absolute certainty.

B2: Then what you are saying is that the theoretical teaching is an incomplete teaching. Is that right?

RH: The Chinese character for *shaku* of *shakumon* (theoretical) means shade. The Chinese character for *hon* of *honmon* (essential) means real or true. Originally *shakumon*, or the theoretical teaching, was written as the introduction to the main part of the sutra which is the essential teaching (*honmon*). The message of *shakumon* cannot reach the same level as *honmon*.

B2: Then, does that mean if you practice *shakumon*, you cannot reach the level of realization that you would if you practice *honmon*?

RH: Yes, it would be difficult to reach the same level. Nichiren compared the difference between the theoretical teachings and the essential teachings to the difference between the scaffolding and the house. To build a house you need the scaffolding, but the main thing is the house itself. Nichiren also describes the theoretical teachings as last year's calendar; and the essential teachings as this year's calendar. Certainly scaffolding is necessary to build a house, just as last year's calendar is important for understanding this year's calendar.

DISCUSSION ON ENLIGHTENMENT

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June 2009

QUESTION: This practice is for reaching enlightenment. What is the effect of a person who enlightens himself?

Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that one can become enlightened only by *hon'ninmyo* (original cause). Shakyamuni's Buddhism on the other hand teaches that when you become enlightened your physical appearance changes and you develop the 32 features and 80 characteristics of the Buddha. Shakyamuni's teaching is *hongamyo* (original effect). In this teaching the outcome is fixed. In the Daishonin's teaching there is not a pre-determined outcome; it is not said that you will be this way or that.

B2: What is the effect of a person who enlightens himself on his own without the aid of a teacher, as compared to having a teacher?

B3: What are the characteristics of an enlightened person? Then, what is it like to be enlightened? What are the practical effects of being enlightened?

B1: If a person who grew up in complete isolation, without connection to anybody or anything—kind of a wild person—but somehow had language and the ability to think, could that person enlighten himself?

B2: Yes, a person in total isolation, or someone who is living in society but practicing entirely on his own without a teacher, could that person enlighten himself? What are the effects of enlightenment? How do you know if someone is enlightened? Or how does someone know if he himself is enlightened?

B4: What does enlightenment mean?

RH: Before the teaching of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo was established there were conflicting views on the way to achieve enlightenment by oneself. There are people who claimed to have reached enlightenment by various means. But once the Lotus Sutra was taught there was no other way to become enlightened. Moreover, since the teaching of the Lotus Sutra no one has reached the level of enlightenment that Nichiren Daishonin reached.

Well known author and poet from the Meiji period (1868-1912) Kenji Miyazawa, whose books are inspirational in their own right, said that when he read passages from the Lotus Sutra for the first time, he couldn't stop shedding tears. I couldn't cry that way even though I've been practicing the Lotus Sutra for a long time. I comprehend how great this sutra is, but still I don't shed tears for it. So I think the level of Miyazawa's comprehension and his sensitivity was probably greater than mine. Still Miyazawa's understanding was far below the level of Nichiren Daishonin's enlightenment. I think Miyazawa's words strongly reflect the message in the Lotus Sutra, especially a poem entitled "We will not be Beaten by Rain." The message in this poem is similar to the 24 characters of Bodhisattva Jofukyo,¹⁵ which translates as: *I respect everyone deeply, I do not despise anyone, or look down on anyone with contempt, because everyone has the capacity to become a Buddha of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, if they believe in Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and practice.*

In terms of enlightenment in general, a person who reaches enlightenment is not fixed in that state. Even after reaching enlightenment a person will continue to get confused or get lost. It's not like reaching a fixed state of perfection.

B1: Then what does *ayuiotchiji* in gongyo mean?

RH: *Ayuiotchiji* means that I will not retreat, I will not backslide. Even if one's situation worsens and the person gets lost, he will continue to strive to go forward, to go onward no matter what. Enlightenment is not a state of perfection. In some ways, it is similar to graduating from university. You get a degree, but that doesn't mean you won't ever forget what you learned in school. You will

¹⁵ Bodhisattva Jofukyo – Bodhisattva Fukyo – a bodhisattva described in the 20th chapter of the Lotus Sutra who revered everyone for their inherent Buddha nature.

forget what your professors taught you and what was said in class, and yet you won't forsake your achievement. You realized that you forgot or are forgetting what you learned, so you go back to your books and relearn it. That's how you continue growing. Similarly, if a person reaches enlightenment, it doesn't mean the person is perfect. Some people who think they have attained enlightenment tend to pontificate. Yet the fact is, even after enlightenment you will sometimes get lost.

B5: Is enlightenment, then, not a fixed state, but an awareness—a consciousness of our surroundings? Can it be defined that way?

RH: No. Enlightenment is realizing or comprehending the message of the Lotus Sutra. That is, realizing that you have the life of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo Buddha within you. That is written in the Lotus Sutra. Even if you are going through difficult times, and bad things are happening to you, still you realize that Namu-myoho-renge-kyo is within you, and so you don't retreat. You don't give up. Instead, you continue to try to grow as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra.

B6: Is it something that you are consciously aware of, where you can say, at this moment I am enlightened, and then at another moment you can say, at this moment I am not enlightened? Is it like a light that goes on and off?

RH: What you say is probably true. Even Nichiren Daishonin could not leave the Ten Worlds¹⁶—Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, etc—where you experience sadness, agony, hunger and anger.

QUESTION: Do you know any enlightened people?

RH: Nichiren Daishonin, Nikko Shonin,¹⁷ Nichimoku Shonin.¹⁸ The way the Atsuhara believers lived and thought is what enlightenment looks like.

People often imagine Buddha to be holy, glorious and of another world. But Nichiren Daishonin didn't live like that. He didn't have nice clothes; he had difficulty finding good food everyday. He was persecuted by the Shogunate government, and he died of diarrhea. So his life was not idyllic, and the same was true for Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin who must have had the same quality of life. Nonetheless, even with a difficult life such as theirs, the important thing is that you keep the spirit of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo with you. That's how Buddhas are.

B5: Can you be more specific on the spirit of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo? What is the spirit of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo?

RH: Although we are ordinary people or common mortals that are weak, confused and have evil natures, we must also realize that we have the life of Buddha within us and are joyful because of this. The Daishonin said the person who realizes this is a Buddha, the person who does not is a common mortal.

¹⁶ Ten Worlds – potential conditions of life inherent in each individual. They are Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddha.

¹⁷ Nikko Shonin – Byakuren Ajari Nikko Shonin (1246-1333) – 2nd High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who received the transfer of the teachings directly from Nichiren Daishonin.

¹⁸ Nichimoku Shonin – Niidakyo Ajari Nichimoku (1260-1333) – 3rd High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism who inherited the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin from Nikko Shonin.

B2: The Atsuhara believers were very ordinary people. Many of them were illiterate. Many could not read or write, and thus clearly could not have read Buddhism and comprehended it. And they certainly hadn't practiced long enough to have had enough instruction to gain sufficient knowledge of Buddhism. But I guess they must have gained wisdom in a short period of time. They had the spirit of Namu-myoho-rence-kyo. They were persecuted by the government for their practice. They were imprisoned and three were executed. The others were banished from their homeland. All because they would not give up their practice. These people were so different from Nichiren Daishonin, Nikko Shoshin and Nichimoku Shonin who studied the teachings, and were literate, and could even read Chinese. Yet, the farmers had the same spirit as Daishonin, Nikko and Nichimoku. Did they know they had that spirit?

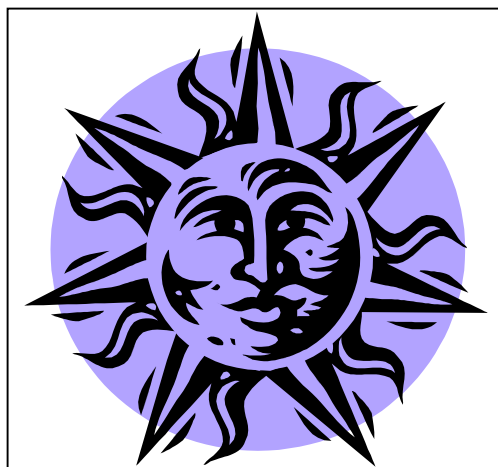
RH: In the goshu Nichiren Daishonin said whoever can distinguish hot from cold can become a Buddha. The point is that the choice would be between a true teaching and a false teaching. If you compared them, which you choose should be obvious. If one religion offers enlightenment for all, and another offers enlightenment only for some, or not at all, then you should instantly know which one to choose. It should be very easy if you know what is a good teaching and what is bad. But because we live in this mundane world where there are earthly values and scattered thoughts, it is not a small number of people who get confused because of a wide range of thoughts and earthly desires. People cannot discern or adhere to the right way. Today we evaluate people based on how they look. So, if Nichiren Daishonin or his disciples, Nikko Shoshin and Nichimoku Shonin, were here now, they would look like poor, ordinary people, and many of us would not even take note of them and realize that they are Buddhas. We would just think that they are shabby, poor people.

QUESTION: What is the negative effect of a poor practice?

RH: We all have weak spirits and weak minds. Our natures are evil, filled with confusion, thievery, contempt, and laziness. But as long as we practice Daishonin's teachings and stay on the correct path, we will eventually become enlightened.

QUESTION: What are the benefits of a good practice?

RH: Enlightenment.





THE PHANTOM CITY

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June 2009

QUESTION: What is the true meaning of the Phantom City parable in the Lotus Sutra? In terms of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, what is the Phantom City that is presented to us, then disappears when we are rested?

RH: In this parable people are seeking enlightenment. They grow very tired because the distance they've traveled is so far. So the Buddha creates a special city and tells them to take a rest. The Phantom City that the Buddha conjures up is provisional or temporary. It corresponds to the teachings before the Lotus Sutra. The sutras taught before the Lotus Sutra taught that *shomon*,¹⁹ *engaku*²⁰ and bodhisattvas²¹ could become enlightened only after they eliminate desires and suffering. Such a teaching as this is only temporary relief, a respite and temporary fulfillment. In order for all people to become enlightened they must reach the Law of the one vehicle.²² That place is the essential nature of the Law (*hossho*) or Eagle Peak²³ (*Ryojusen*). In addition, the way we are living in our present life is part of eternal life, but it is also temporary existence. This life is real, it is an actual fact. But if we believe that only this is true, we cannot reach enlightenment and comprehend the essential nature of the Law.

This parable appears in chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra. The Japanese title of this chapter is *Kejo Soku Housho*, which means the Phantom City equals the Treasure Land. The context of the story is as I mention above, but the meaning of the chapter title is different. The title indicates that we also need to make this earth—this mundane world—a fruitful or valuable place. The sutras adhered to by the Nembutsu sect which worships Amida Buddha,²⁴ denies this earthly world and instead encourages aspiration for the heavenly realm as soon as possible, whereas this chapter of the Lotus Sutra says we must create meaning in this world. If this world is filthy, we need to clean it up. If this world is empty, we need to achieve something here and make it meaningful. This is what this chapter title indicates.

The Amida Sutra teaches that we should leave this world and enter the Heaven of Perfect Bliss in the western region where Amida Buddha resides. The Lotus Sutra, on the other hand, teaches that it is meaningless to pursue something in a different world. As long as we have been born in this world and live in this world, we should pursue becoming a Buddha in this world. According to the Lotus

¹⁹ Shomon – Men of Learning, or Voice Hearers – these were disciples of Shakyamuni, men and women who listened to the Buddha's teachings.

²⁰ Engaku – Men of Realization or pratyekabuddhas who perceived the truth of impermanence and the twelve-linked chain of causation.: 1) ignorance; 2) ignorance causes action; 3) action causes consciousness; 4) consciousness causes name and form; 5) name and form cause the six sense organs; 6) the six sense organs cause contact; 7) contact causes sensation; 8) sensation causes desire; 9) desire causes attachments; 10) attachment causes existence; 11) existence causes birth; 12) birth causes old age and death.

²¹ Bodhisattva – one who aspires to Buddhahood.

²² Law of the One Vehicle – Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

²³ Eagle Peak – the place in India where Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra. It is also symbolizes the Buddha land or Buddhahood.

²⁴ Amida Buddha – the Buddha of the land of Perfect Bliss in the western region.

Sutra, we are not aspiring to become Buddha through death. But by believing in Namu-myoho-renge-kyo we can become Buddha in this world—in this life.

B2: So if this world is the actual treasure land, it is for us to perceive it. So no matter what struggles we're going through, it is for us to try to see the treasure land in this moment. Is that right?

RH: Here we may have many difficulties, illnesses and agonies, but creating a treasure land here does not mean building a beautiful house, or having a great relationship or a big car. It does not mean building a physical or material place. Through belief in the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, no matter what kind of problems we have, we can transcend our problems and achieve this treasure land in our hearts and minds.

B2: Transforming sufferings into joy because that is the spirit of Buddha?

RH: Yes, that's right. In Daishonin's goshō he calls it *hendoku iyaku*, meaning transforming poison into medicine. So in Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, he never denies this world. For example, even if there are people who oppose us, we still need to acknowledge them and embrace them. Many people think that Nichiren was a radical militant. The fact is, Nichiren never ignored, denied or rejected his opponents. What he taught was that we must embrace and affirm even those who are against us. SGI, by contrast, attack people who are against them. They consider people who oppose them as enemies. So it is clear that the Gakkai goes against the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. It is therefore difficult for the Gakkai to follow the true teaching.

B2: On one hand you say you don't deny this world, but then you go on to say in your answer above, "if you believe that only this world is true, then you will not reach enlightenment and comprehend the essential nature of the Law." So you have to recognize that there is more than this world. Can you speak to this contradiction?

RH: I admit that there is a contradiction between the meaning of the title and the actual text of the chapter. The title states that the Phantom City is the real Treasure Land which is obviously different from the contents which indicates that it is elsewhere. Many believers think that you can't achieve the heavenly land here, that it exists in another realm. But you must honestly try hard to make this world better—to reach that heavenly realm here. It's meaningless to pursue or aspire to heaven somewhere else.

B2: When you say reach that heavenly realm here, do you mean create or reach that within you? Create that kind of heart within you? It's meaningless to seek it elsewhere?

RH: The relationship between the Phantom City and the Treasure Land is that the Phantom City is a world based on our desires, and the Treasure Land should be the world based on the Buddha's teachings.

The basic parable of the phantom city is: "a group of travelers are making a journey of five hundred *yojana*²⁵ to reach a remote place where there is treasure. The road is steep and treacherous, and midway the travelers lose heart and want to turn back. Seeing this, their guide uses his mystic powers to make a city appear ahead of them as the three-hundred-*yojana* point. There they rest and regain their spirits, convinced that they have been saved from the dangers of the road. Once they have

²⁵ Yojana – a unit of measure in ancient India that was between 9.6 and 24 kilometers.

recovered from their exhaustion, the guide makes the conjured city disappear and tells them that the treasure land, their true destination, is not far away."²⁶

The reason why the guide manifested the phantom city was to motivate his people to continue the journey to the real destination. The catch is, the real place may not be as luxurious and entertaining as what the travelers experienced in the phantom city where there was nice music, good food and beautiful people. The real destination is not like that. The reason the guide conjured up the place was to motivate them. Here the phantom city represents our own desires—what we want—and the treasure land—our destination—represents the Buddha's world. Here in this world we can create what our hearts desire. Some people prefer this world of desire to the Buddha's world within you, and don't want to go on that journey to discover the Buddha's world within. But of course, the real purpose of life—our real destination is the Buddha's world. That's what the contents of this chapter says. But the title indicates something different. It says that where we live is the temporary world or the phantom city, but we cannot leave this world. As we discussed, we cannot pursue the Buddha's world in the western Heaven of Perfect Bliss or some other place. We must find the Buddha's world right here. We must achieve it in this world.

It's complicated.

GOSHO SELECTION

EXCERPT

THE TREASURE OF A FILIAL CHILD

I was deeply grieved to hear the news about the nun, the wife of Ko Nyudo. Please tell her that I think very fondly of her.

I have received your various gifts of one *kan* and five hundred *mon* of coins, laver, wakame seaweed and dried rice, and have respectfully reported this in the presence of the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra says, "Among those who hear of this Law, there is not one who shall not attain Buddhahood." Although this passage consists of but ten characters, to read even a single phrase of the Lotus Sutra is to read without omission all the sacred teachings preached by Shakyamuni Buddha during his lifetime. Therefore, the Great Teacher Miao-lo says, "If, in propagating the Lotus Sutra, one is to interpret even one of its doctrines, he must take into consideration all the Buddha's lifetime of teachings and master them from beginning to end."

By "beginning" he means the Kegon Sutra, and by "end" he means the Nirvana Sutra. The Kegon Sutra was preached at the time when the Buddha had first gained enlightenment, when the great bodhisattvas Dharma Wisdom, Forest of Merit and others, responding to the request of a bodhisattva called Moon of Emancipation, preached in the Buddha's presence. I do not know in what form this sutra may exist in India, in the dragon king's palace or in the Tushita Heaven, but it has been brought to Japan in a sixty-volume version, an eighty-volume version and a forty-volume version. In the case of

²⁶ From *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts*, pp. 337

the last of the teachings, the Nirvana Sutra, I again do not know in what form it may exist in India or in the dragon king's palace, but in our country it exists in a forty-volume version, a thirty six-volume version, a six-volume version and a two-volume version.

In addition to these sutras, there are the Agon sutras, the Hodo sutras and the Hannya sutras, which run to five thousand or seven thousand volumes. But even though we may not see or hear of any of these various sutras, if we read so much as a single word or phrase of the Lotus Sutra, it is just as though we were reading every word of all these various sutras.

It is like the two characters that compose the name for India, Gasshi, or the name for Japan, Nihon. The two characters that make up the name Gasshi encompass the five regions of India, the sixteen major kingdoms, the five hundred intermediate kingdoms, the ten thousand minor kingdoms and the countless smaller countries like scattered grains of millet, all with their great land areas, great mountains, their plants and trees, and their human inhabitants and domestic animals. Or it is like a mirror, which may be only one inch, two inches, three inches, four inches or five inches in size, but which can reflect the image of a person who is one foot or five feet in height, or of a great mountain that is ten feet, twenty feet, a hundred feet or a thousand feet in size.

Thus when we read the above passage from the Lotus Sutra, we know that all persons who hear of the sutra will, without a single exception, attain Buddhahood.

All the various beings in the nine worlds and the six paths differ from one another in their minds. It is like the case of two people, three people or a hundred or a thousand people: Though all have faces about a foot in length, no two look exactly alike. Their minds differ, and therefore their faces differ, too. How much greater still is the difference between the minds of two people, of ten people and of all the living beings in the six paths and the nine worlds! So it is that some love the blossoming cherry trees and some love the moon, some prefer sour things and some prefer bitter ones, some like little things and some like big. People have various tastes. Some prefer good and some prefer evil. People are of many kinds.

But though they differ from one another in such ways as these, when they enter into the Lotus Sutra, they all become like a single person in body and a single person in mind. This is just like the various rivers that, when they flow into the great ocean, all take on a uniformly salty flavor, or like the different kinds of birds that, when they approach Mount Sumeru, all assume the same [golden] hue. Thus Devadatta, who had committed three of the five cardinal sins, and Rahula, who observed all of the two hundred and fifty precepts, both alike became Buddhas. And both King Myoshogon, who held erroneous views, and Shariputra, who held correct views, equally received predictions that they would attain Buddhahood. This is because, in the words of the passage quoted earlier, "There is not one who shall not attain Buddhahood."

In the Amida and other sutras expounded during the first forty and more years of the Buddha's preaching life, Shariputra is said to have achieved great merit by reciting the name of Amida Buddha a million times in the space of seven days. But since these sutras were repudiated as teachings belonging to the period when the Buddha had "not yet revealed the truth," such recitation is in fact as meaningless as if one were to boil water for seven days and then throw it into the ocean.

Lady Vaidehi, by reading the Kammuryoju Sutra, was able to reach the stage known as the realization of non-birth and non-extinction. But since this sutra was cast aside with the Buddha's words that he would now "honestly discard the provisional teachings," unless Lady Vaidehi were to take faith in the Lotus Sutra, she must revert to her former status as an ordinary woman.

One's acts of great good are nothing to rely on. If he fails to encounter the Lotus Sutra, what can they avail? Nor should one lament that he has committed acts of great evil. For if only he practices the one vehicle, then he can follow in the footsteps of Devadatta [in attaining Buddhahood]. All this is because the sutra passage that declares, "There is not one who shall not attain Buddhahood," was not spoken in vain....