

# THE MIDDLE WAY<sup>®</sup>

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

WINTER

2010

## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Reverend Raido Hirota  
Mt. Holly, New Jersey  
June 2008

**QUESTION:** Doesn't everyone have two parents? Therefore there should be no problem following the teachings of both the Shoshin-kai<sup>1</sup> and Rissho Kosei Kai.<sup>2</sup> You have explained what is wrong with the Soka Gakkai,<sup>3</sup> but what is wrong with Rissho Kosei Kai?

**Reverend Raido Hirota:** Rissho Kosei Kai is a religious off-shoot of the Nichiren Shu<sup>4</sup> faith. It was founded in 1938 by Nikkyo Niwano who parted from Reiyukai (founded in 1923). They chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo,<sup>5</sup> but they worship Shakyamuni Buddha.<sup>6</sup> The purpose of their religion is to pray and mourn for their deceased ancestors as a means to become happy, and to eradicate bad karma. They believe that if they mourn and pray to the deceased for their bad luck, bad health, hardship and pain then all their problems will be solved. These two sects do not worship the Daishonin<sup>7</sup> as a Buddha, but they believe as a result of their connection to Nichiren that everybody has the Buddha nature.

<sup>1</sup> Shoshin-kai – the organization of Nichiren Shoshu priests dedicated to the protection and dissemination of Nichiren Daishonin's true teachings.

<sup>2</sup> Rissho Kosei Kai – a lay organization that has beliefs similar to Nichiren Shu.

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

<sup>4</sup> Nichiren Shu – a sect of Nichiren Buddhism situated at Minobu in Japan that worships Shakyamuni as the true Buddha, chants Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and practices meditation.

<sup>5</sup> Namu-myoho-renge-kyo – the Mystic Law; the ultimate Law of life and the universe; the Buddha nature in all things.

<sup>6</sup> Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029 B.C.E. – 949 B.C.E.), the historical founder of Buddhism.

<sup>7</sup> 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 he means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

*Happy New Year!*



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### *The Middle Way*

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While it is very important to pray for the dead, it is not the way for you to become happy. Furthermore, you cannot eradicate your karma. Reiyukai is the mother of Rissho Kosei Kai, and thus has the same teachings as Rissho Kosei Kai.

Japan is a country where of all the sutras the Lotus Sutra<sup>8</sup> is chanted the most. The Japanese believe that if you chant Namu-myoho-renge-kyo you'll be fine. These religions may chant the sutra, but one must always look at the way they chant the sutra, whether they're chanting for someone else, for their own well-being, or whether they are chanting in a way that recognizes the equality of everything. Don't be like a fish in the ocean, where if it sees bait it will go after the bait. Don't be that fish.

**Believer 1 (B1):** Why can't you practice two religions if they are similar?

**RH:** Conflict will arise in some way. It's like having two husbands or two wives; one's life will be complicated.

**B1:** It's like having a mother and a father. Don't you need a mother and a father?

**RH:** If the father says one thing and the mother says something completely different, the child will grow up confused.

**Believer 2 (B2):** My grandson is 13 years old and wants to chant and attend the meeting, but his parents are Catholic and won't let him come. My grandson is very upset.

**RH:** The sutra basically says that you have your own concept of what you want to be. That derives from the society in which you live. There is a past society, a present society and a society being created for the future. Namu-myoho-renge-kyo is the teaching that encompasses all of this, and is the truth. This teaching explains that everyone has Namu-myoho-renge-kyo inside them. So this teaching cannot be wrong because it includes everyone and everything. If the Catholic Church said you can become god or you are god, that would be fine. But the Catholic Church will never say that. In fact, if the priests said something completely different each week, the parishioners would get confused.

**QUESTION: What happens when you doubt yourself, but not the practice? Is doubting yourself, or your ability to carry through with the practice, actually doubting this Buddhism itself?**

**RH:** Daishonin teaches simply that everyone has the life of Buddha within them. Try to become close to Buddha's life. Don't believe in yourself or disbelieve in yourself based on your own knowledge and experience. If you do not doubt Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, then follow Daishonin's teachings and try to live your life in the way you can believe in yourself.

**B3:** It seems that the longer you practice, the harder it gets. The bigger the obstacles, the more faith you need. It's good growth. But it's hard.

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<sup>8</sup> 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.

**RH:** To not doubt and follow the Law<sup>9</sup> as close as possible is the way to enlightenment. If you are lost on the road, you either ask someone for directions or you go back to where you were. The real strength is being honest with yourself and admitting that you are lost.

In my youth I found it stressful to do gongyo.<sup>10</sup> I was agitated by the idea of doing gongyo. But once I did gongyo I felt peace and I had the feeling that I wanted to continue the practice. If someone said they never doubted or never got lost, that person would be lying. The path is always filled with the sense of becoming lazy. That's how the real practice is.

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## ELEMENTS OF ICHINEN SANZEN

Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, New Jersey

June 2008

**QUESTION:** In the Goshō<sup>11</sup> “The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon<sup>12</sup>” it says, “All phenomena reveal the true entity.” Miao-lo states, “The true entity<sup>13</sup> is invariably revealed in all phenomena, and all phenomena invariably possess the Ten Factors<sup>14</sup>. The Ten Factors invariably function within the Ten Worlds<sup>15</sup>, and the Ten Worlds invariably entail both life and its environment.” How does this relate to us?

**RH:** Daishonin states in the beginning of “The True Object of Worship”, “Volume Five of the *Maka Shikan* states, ‘A single entity of life is endowed with the Ten Worlds. At the same time, each of the Ten Worlds is endowed with all the others, so that an entity of life actually possesses one hundred worlds. Each of these worlds in turn possesses thirty realms, which means that in the one hundred worlds there are three thousand realms.’” This means that a particle of dust has the ten worlds and therefore, it “has the innate Buddha nature, along with the other causes and conditions needed to attain Buddhahood.” Moreover, “the world of Hell also contains the world of Buddhahood,” and the world of Buddhahood contains the world of Hell as well as all the other worlds.

The equality of all people represents one hundred worlds, one thousand factors (*hyaku-kai senyo*). The three realms of existence (*sanseken*)—consisting of: the five components (*go'on-seken*)—form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness; the differences between individual living beings (*shujo-seken*); and the realm of the environment (*kokudo-seken*)—when multiplied to the one

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<sup>9</sup> Law – the Mystic Law of Myoho-renge-kyo – the ultimate universal Law of life and death.

<sup>10</sup> Gongyo – the practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which includes the morning and evening recitation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting the Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

<sup>11</sup> Goshō – the sacred writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

<sup>12</sup> Gohonzon – the scroll that is the mandala of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, representing the universal Law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and the Buddha nature in all things.

<sup>13</sup> True entity – the ultimate truth of all reality, which is the original Law of Myoho-renge-kyo.

<sup>14</sup> Ten Factors – the unchanging aspects of life common to all forms of life. They are: appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, consistency from beginning to end.

<sup>15</sup> Ten Worlds – potential conditions of life inherent in each individual. They are: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

thousand factors equals 3,000 realms of existence. These three thousand realms of existence signify the universe. This fundamental principle is *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*.

Nichiren Daishonin's teachings state that *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* exists in everything, and all life is connected. The practitioner's thoughts or how one holds one's posture of faith depends on or goes hand in hand with the environment, whether it's the natural environment or the world that is out there. So if our posture of faith starts to decline, the effect will be seen in our environment—in our outside world or in nature. And if the natural world is also crumbling, that affects our environment and the way we live. In the teachings that came before Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, whether it is Zen Buddhism or any other sect of Buddhism, Christianity or any other religion, man comes first. The teaching behind the concept of *ichinen sanzen*<sup>16</sup> (the three thousand realms of existence in a single life entity) can be found even in a particle of dust in the air.

**B2:** What do you mean when you say man comes first?

**RH:** Christianity and Judaism, for example, teach that god first created the heavens and the earth, then created man to have dominion over all. And in Zen they only look at themselves to better themselves.

**B4:** If there is a fundamental equality – we all know that what happens in China affects us here; that we're all connected at some point—but for instance, Tom Freeman says that if we stopped driving cars in the U.S., within one month China would burn all that oil we saved. It wouldn't make any difference. You become discouraged that one person can have any affect. There seems to be a premise that if you chant *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*, you affect life at its most fundamental core. That act has a much greater affect than some other acts, like one person conserving energy. Is that true? If I turn my lights off, will my neighbors turn their lights off?

**B1:** If you view it through the Gakkai mind, they would say, because I chant I'm affecting things on a fundamental level. So it doesn't matter how big my SUV is, or how big my carbon imprint is on the environment.

**B4:** It's like the Catholic view. Since I go to confession, it doesn't matter if I sin, I'll confess later.

**RH:** The Gakkai believes the same way. As long as they chant *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo*, they can commit all the sins in the world.

To say that when I turn my lights off, my neighbors will turn their lights off is to speak of like-minded people—people who immediately understand the importance of what you are doing. If the world declines more into anarchy, there will be people who commit criminal acts and there will be people who will say it's not wrong because everyone else is doing it. There are always two sides to everything—a positive side and a negative side. In Japan there is a saying, "If you cross the street on a red light with everybody, it's not scary. But if someone is involved in a traffic accident, that person has to take responsibility." It could be said that everyone was crossing and the person who got injured was wrong.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that *Namu-myoho-enge-kyo* exists in all life, so you have to spread the word.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ichinen sanzen* – a single life moment contains three thousand realms of existence.

**QUESTION:** What are the five components exactly? An individual is said to be a combination of the five components, but if you dissected a person, you would never see a “form” part, a “perception” part, etc. What happens at death to the five components?

**RH:** The five components (*go'on seken*) are: form (*shiki*), the physical aspect (the body); perception (*ju*), perceiving the five senses as well as the sense of thought; conception (*so*), mental ideas coming from the perception of the six senses; volition (*gyo*), the will to act; consciousness (*shiki*), discernment which brings about perception, conception and volition.

**B6:** For the past few decades there have been a lot of pure rationalists surfacing, especially now with what people are finding out in studying the brain. They are now able to map things in the brain. There's a sense developing that everything is purely physical and that's it. How do you communicate Buddhism to someone who thinks like this? This is the way philosophers are talking. A lot of people are starting to abandon traditional beliefs. Yes, there is a physical aspect. And you can say that there is perception. But how do you explain Buddhism to someone who says that everything can be mapped in our brains, and science is validating this view?

**RH:** The five components are a reflection of our minds. Each one of the five components in us is different. And when we die they disperse. If you have been chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo and have it within you, when you die your five components will not disperse.

Scientists and people in the medical field, who do not understand the five components, don't have a clear answer as to the causes of mental illness. If they haven't developed a remedy for mental illness at this stage of human development, they will never understand the essence of the human mind. In Japan, depression is a huge problem. Every year over 30,000 people commit suicide. People are driven crazy by having both the will to live and the desire to die. The doctors in Japan have no means to fix the problem. Things like mental illness—depression—are also a part of the five components.

**B4:** Neuroscientists have said that it's simply a matter of not having enough serotonin in the brain so the brain does not function properly. It's not a spiritual problem, it's a physical problem. They figure out the right medication to make the serotonin the right level.

**RH:** There's a practitioner I know who takes medicine regularly but he doesn't fully recover. He's taking a pill that only lessens the symptoms, but doesn't eliminate them.

**B4:** There's a very popular woman on the Internet whose name is Joyce Bolt Taylor. She was a neuroscientist who had a massive hemorrhage – a massive stroke in her left hemisphere which took place over a 45 minute period. During that time all of her connections to everything around her became revealed. She was in the shower at the time. Her skin disappeared and every cell in her body—every aspect of herself—was connected to her surroundings and the water flowing over her. There was no separation between herself and any other existence. It sounds a lot like enlightenment.

**RH:** Did she survive?

**B4:** Yes, she survived. But she lost language, context, ego, personality, etc. She turned into a state of infancy. It took her eight years of therapy to recover. She has been able to recover, and she's sharing this insight. She wrote a book called *Stroke of Insights* in which she shares this experience. The point is that it was not a spiritual practice that brought her to have the insights; it was a physical event that

occurred in her brain. The left brain is ego, context, logic, linear thinking, etc. Once that was taken away, the right brain was able to open up to the entire universe.

**RH:** As that woman's life demonstrates, in our perception of the world there are more things that we don't understand than we do understand. The things that we don't perceive are things like past lives and future lives. These are things we don't understand. In Nichiren Daishonin's teachings the Daishonin regards these existences as a continuous flow—a linear continuum—without interruption. As we perceive yesterday, today and tomorrow as a continuous flow, where, if there are changes, they are in the day and the hour, Daishonin views past life, present life and future life as a continuous flow. The perception we have right now is that we live in a world where we think we understand everything. We perceive that our minds and our lives are stable because we perceive that we know everything. That thought however is mistaken.

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## **RESPONSIBILITIES & BEHAVIOR OF A BUDDHIST**

**Reverend Raido Hirota**

**Mt. Holly, New Jersey**

**June 2008**

**QUESTION: As a Buddhist, how far does our level of responsibility go towards other people? What does that responsibility entail?**

**RH:** Daishonin, during his life, remonstrated with the Kamakura government, using the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*<sup>17</sup> to implore the leaders to use Namu-myoho-enge-kyo as their foundation to govern wisely, or else there would never be peace and prosperity in the nation. Everything must be based on Namu-myoho-enge-kyo. You have responsibility no matter what your position is. This practice is not for you to gain fame, fortune or power. Shakubuku<sup>18</sup> is the way to create a pure and normal society. You cannot achieve peace through charitable acts.

**B5:** I read somewhere in the goshō that if someone treats you with contempt, then leave them alone. My view is that you have a responsibility to all people to try to make their lives as pleasant as possible. So when it comes to people who treat you with contempt, do you leave them alone as it says in the goshō? Is that right?

**RH:** I'm not sure what goshō you read that in.

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<sup>17</sup> *Rissho Ankoku Ron* – (“On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism) One of Nichiren Daishonin's major writings, written to the Kamakura government on July 16, 1260, it encourages government officials to abandon their belief in erroneous teachings and take up faith in Namu-myoho-enge-kyo in order to avert disaster and establish peace in the country.

<sup>18</sup> *Shakubuku* – a method of propagating Buddhism by directly leading a person to the True Law and refuting his erroneous views.

**B5:** I'm not sure which gosho, but it stuck out when I read it. It seems at odds with Bodhisattva Jofukyo's<sup>19</sup> message to treat everyone with respect.

**RH:** Do you mean if you see something wrong you leave it alone? Or that if someone does something bad to you, you leave them alone?

**B5:** It says if someone treats you with contempt.

**RH:** Yes. Daishonin did say such a thing. What he meant by it was this: Nichiren Daishonin went through all sorts of hardship in his life: The Izu Exile,<sup>20</sup> the Tatsunokuchi Persecution,<sup>21</sup> the Sado Exile.<sup>22</sup> In Daishonin's eyes people who persecuted him were innocent. He never challenged his trials, or said he didn't want to endure them. He accepted them.

Ryokan was a monk in high position during the Kamakura period in Nichiren Daishonin's time. He was the chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple and was celebrated for building hospitals, giving lots of charity to the poor, and administering medicine to the sick. Everyone, but Nichiren Daishonin, respected him. Daishonin described him as two-faced and criticized his action. Daishonin explained that on one hand Ryokan built a road to improve commerce, while at the same time profited by collecting toll. Such behavior was something the Daishonin hated. And because Daishonin didn't criticize him rather than praising him, Daishonin's name became mud. He knew that his criticism would encourage censor and hatred. But he also knew that he had to do it. Nichiren Daishonin said, if you are a monk, you should save people through your teachings, not by distributing medicine, food and the like.

**B1:** I don't think many people understand that point. Would you please expand on the idea that you cannot "achieve peace through charitable acts?" The Gakkai is now emphasizing charitable acts.

**RH:** As Ryokan's charity demonstrates, just because you do charitable acts, it doesn't make the world any better. To have the proper teaching is the way to go.

**B7:** So Ryokan did charity that benefited him?

**RH:** There is that aspect too.

**B5:** I always viewed charity as saying, "you can rely on me." Charity is not charity at all, because what you're doing is letting the other person lean on you in order to get what he wants.

**RH:** If there is a country that is lacking in food or water, it's one thing to provide them with food or medicine, but it would be of much greater help to provide them with the power by which they can start helping themselves. When a country provides relief of food or medicine to another country, it's always for the benefit of the country that is giving rather than for the country that is receiving the aid. First

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<sup>19</sup> Bodhisattva Jofukyo – Bodhisattva Fukyo – a bodhisattva described in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra who revered everyone for their inherent Buddha nature.

<sup>20</sup> Izu Exile – Nichiren Daishonin was banished to the Izu Peninsula from May 12, 1261 to February 22, 1263 for propagating his form of Buddhism.

<sup>21</sup> Tatsunokuchi Persecution – an unsuccessful attempt to execute Nichiren Daishonin on September 12, 1271 at the execution grounds outside of Kamakura.

<sup>22</sup> Sado Exile – following the foiled attempt to execute Nichiren Daishonin at Tatsunokuchi, he was banished to the remote island of Sado from October 10, 1271 – March 13, 1274.

World countries like America and the European countries go to Africa or Brazil, remove the native crops that grew there and start growing the crops that they want, such as coffee. The farmers in Africa, for example, no longer grow the food they need to sustain themselves, and they only make pennies from the coffee crops. So basically, the poor countries stay poor, and the rich countries get richer. Thus the First World countries are not really helping.



**B4:** There's an old saying, if you give a man a fish, he has a meal; if you teach a man to fish, he eats forever.

**B3:** Nichiren Daishonin despised Ryokan, but he did not despise the people who were going to behead him. I don't understand. Could you explain?

**RH:** Nichiren Daishonin did not despise the person, he despised Ryokan's acts—his behavior. Daishonin teaches that a true teaching is one that, if a person is trying to kill you, it can save that person who is trying to kill you. If it can't save such a person, then how can you call it a true teaching? This teaching corresponds to the behavior of Bodhisattva Jofukyo.

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## KARMA REVISITED

Reverend Raido Hirota

Mt. Holly, New Jersey

June 2008

**QUESTION:** You have said on a past occasion, which was also recently published, that in a true Buddhist sense, there is no such thing as karma except as a moral corrective. This goes against a lot of our conceptions of what Buddhism is about. The word karma is used so extensively in the Buddhist canon. For instance, what is the 8<sup>th</sup> consciousness,<sup>23</sup> if not the 'storehouse' consciousness? Can you give a more detailed explanation to this matter?

**RH:** Christian philosophy holds that god created everything and god determines everything. This philosophy is based on the writings on destiny and predestination (*Umei Ron*), which states that to qualify to go to heaven one should be a person of good morals and a upstanding citizen.

The Consciousness-only School<sup>24</sup> is a sect whose purpose is to analyze and systematize all religions in the world. Their idea is that human life has eight consciousnesses. The eighth consciousness is called *alaya*-consciousness,<sup>25</sup> which is a state of unconsciousness. This sect believes

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<sup>23</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> Consciousness – see *alaya*-consciousness below

<sup>24</sup> Consciousness-only School – one of the two major Mahayana schools of Buddhism in India which believes that all phenomena arise from consciousness and the basis of all functions of consciousness is the *alaya*-consciousness. The doctrine of the Consciousness-only School was established by Maitreya (270-350) and developed by Ananda and Vasubandhu in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>25</sup> *Alaya*-consciousness – the storehouse consciousness, located below conscious awareness, it is the karma repository.



that the *alaya*-consciousness influences the other seven consciousnesses, is the root of all phenomena and is the ultimate reality. Prior to T'ien-t'ai,<sup>26</sup> the *alaya*-consciousness only existed in human life. The 8<sup>th</sup> consciousness was used to teach about moral judgment to create good belief and to put it into practice. It was believed that one had to purify an impure life to be able to achieve enlightenment. But T'ien-t'ai discarded this perception. He proposed a ninth consciousness (*amala*-consciousness) which was free from impurity. T'ien-t'ai believed that all life (not just human life) possessed the 9<sup>th</sup> consciousness. Nichiren Daishonin identified this consciousness as Myoho-rence-kyo—the heart of Buddhahood.

The *amala*-consciousness is the connection between people and their surrounding environment. *Amala*-consciousness is the root or source of all life. Nichiren Daishonin explained that the *amala*-consciousness, which is Namu-myoho-rence-kyo, clearly indicates that everything is one.

If one does not practice the proper practice, one will live his entire life without knowing the truth about life. Also, if one does not practice properly and search within one's own consciousness and reach the deepest place in one's soul, one cannot call it a proper practice. All the people here in this room, and other practitioners elsewhere come from different life paths. When you chant the sutra, all your different degrees and information you've acquired growing up become irrelevant. With the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, if you can at least touch on the deepest place in your mind—in your soul—through your own consciousness, that will enable you to practice it everyday, day in and day out. If you don't do that—that is, if you don't practice properly, your practice may just end. Ultimately, it is important for someone who has strong faith to also have a knowledgeable background. But the true essence of the teaching lies somewhere beyond the knowledge you may have gained. A college professor may have more knowledge based on critical questioning, but probably has less faith than people here.

**B4:** So you said you have touched the deepest part of your soul. How do you do that?

**RH:** When you're chanting the sutra, you're trying to go to a place beyond textbook knowledge. That's when you'll feel euphoria. It's a feeling which you can't pass on to anyone. It's just for yourself. You're just content with that feeling.

**B3:** Do you chant with the sole purpose of seeing the Buddha in your own mind? Is that how you do it?

**RH:** It's touching the inner Buddha within you. It's the unity of all things: yourself, the people next to you, and people who have died before you. It's complete unity of all people.

**B2:** Is it higher heights and deeper depths? That's the feeling that I have.

**RH:** I don't know what each person feels. But what the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin says is that it is something you shouldn't feel on the outside, but rather it is felt somewhere that is closest to you, which is inside. People always say when they are really happy that they feel like they are going up. But to actually "go up" would be scary.

**QUESTION:** Your explanation of karma is confusing. Can you please clarify?

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<sup>26</sup> T'ien-t'ai – (538-597) the founder of the Chinese school of Buddhism, who made a theoretical categorization of Shakyamuni's teachings.

**RH:** The past life is the cause for our present existence. This is destiny.

*Shukumi* is the Japanese word which is closer to the English word destiny. *Shuku* means to house. A lot of times this word has a bad connotation. It could mean that you're harboring something. But destiny doesn't always have to be bad.

The Japanese word for karma is *go*. People like to group things in categories of good and bad. So there is actually good *go* and bad *go*. Back in the day when doctors didn't know what cancer was, and all cancers were terminal, it was called a *go* illness in Japan. Because of that the word *go* and the word *shukumi* – karma or destiny – have had an ill connotation. But all *go* has the same root whether it's good or bad.

**B4:** The classic definition of karma that I learned when I first became a Buddhist in the Soka Gakkai is: the sum effect of all the causes you made throughout your life and throughout all your previous lives. So this moment in time you are the sum total of all the causes you've previously made. The last time we talked about it, there was some sense that there isn't a carry over from past lives. I had learned in my early days of Buddhism that every cause is eternal and goes into the next life, whatever it is, and you carry these causes with you. I'm not so sure that you agree with that.

**RH:** *Go* or karma is the basics or building blocks of life. On top of the building blocks of life are the human emotions or human experiences. So one person may say I was lucky because I was born a man; another person may say I was unlucky because I was born a man. Or someone may say I was lucky to be born in America, while another may say I was unlucky to be born in America. That's just the human aspect of karma. But karma is the building blocks of life. In reality *go* shouldn't have the stigma of good or bad, lucky or unlucky attached to it.

**B4:** If life is eternal, and the causes I've made in my past life, when I come back in whatever life form, those causes come with me from lifetime to lifetime to lifetime. It continues on—it's eternal. Do you agree?

**RH:** Yes, it does connect. Karma is a general term. The Gakkai says something like "cutting the ties of karma," or "reversing your destiny." These are things Nichiren Daishonin did not say.

**B4:** They call it lessening your karma.

**RH:** In Japanese they say "cutting or severing the ties of karma."

**RH:** *Tenju kyoju* – lessening karmic retribution. There is such a thing as *tenju kyoju*. But you cannot remove your karma completely. The Ten Worlds – Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, Buddha – are karmas as well. Cutting those ties is impossible.

**B4:** The Gakkai is very Christian in that sin and karma are similar. In Catholicism if you said enough prayers you could actually buy what they call "indulgences", and then you don't have to go to purgatory; you could go straight to heaven. Similarly, in the Gakkai if you chant enough daimoku,<sup>27</sup> or do enough activities, your poor karma gets paid back. It's a bargain.

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<sup>27</sup> Daimoku – Odaimoku – chanting Namu-myoho-renge-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

**RH:** The Gakkai revolves around fear. They always say you need to chant Odaimoku to repent for your karma. It's the same with Christianity; they use a sense of fear. Daishonin teaches that practitioners are slanderers and evil doers, but they also have the Buddha in them. So the Ten Worlds are always within them. There is evil in us, but there is also good.

I've explained the *juzu* before. The total number of beads in the inner body of beads is 112. 108 of these beads represent the feeling of being lost as a human being. The four smaller beads dispersed within the 108 represent the Four Bodhisattvas<sup>28</sup> (Jogyo, Muhengyo, Anrugyo and Jyogyo). The basic condition of our lives is confusion or being lost. When you put your hands together and pray holding the *juzu* you envelop this state of being lost. The state of confusion is the Ten Worlds. When you clasp your hands together and chant Namu-myoho-rence-kyo, you are surrounding the human condition of confusion with the enlightened state of Buddha. All people have an infinite amount of evil and an infinite amount of good. By clasping your hands and chanting the sutra, you are thereby seeking the Buddha. That is why the four bodhisattvas are represented in the *juzu*.

So there is no reason to be afraid of karma. But if one lets the karma loose like a wild animal, it eventually ends up doing bad things and becoming bad karma.

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## GOSHO SELECTION

*EXCERPT*

**“The Fourteen Slanders”**

*Story of Sessen Doji*

Long, long ago there was a young man who lived in the Snow Mountains and was called Sessen Doji. He gathered brackens and nuts to keep himself alive, made garments of deerskin to clothe his body and quietly practiced the Way. As he observed the world with care and attention, Sessen Doji came to understand that nothing is permanent and everything changes, and that all that is born is destined to die. This weary world is as fleeting as a flash of lightning, as the morning dew that vanishes in the sun, as a lamp easily blown out by the wind, or as the fragile leaves of the plantain that are so readily broken.

No one can escape this transience. In the end, all must take the journey to the Yellow Springs, the land of death. When we imagine the trip to the other world, we sense utter darkness. There is no light from the sun, the moon, or the stars; not even so much as a torch to illuminate the way. And along that dark road, there is no one to keep you company. When one is in the saha world, he is surrounded by parents and relatives, brothers and sisters, wife and children, and retainers. Fathers may show lofty compassion, and mothers, profound loving sympathy. Husband and wife may be as faithful

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<sup>28</sup> Four Bodhisattvas – they first appear in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Lotus Sutra and signify the four virtues of the Buddha (true self, eternity, purity, and happiness). In Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism the four bodhisattvas are viewed collectively as the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin.

as two shrimps of the sea who vow to share the same hole and never to part throughout life. Yet, though they push their pillows side by side and sport together under the quilts embroidered with mandarin ducks, they can never be together on that journey to the land of death. As you travel alone in darkness, who will come to encourage you?

Though old and young alike dwell in the realm of uncertainty, it is part of the natural order for the elderly to die first and the young to remain awhile. Thus, even as we grieve, we can find some cause for consolation. Sometimes, however, it is the old who remain and the young who die first. No one feels more bitter resentment than a young child who dies before his parents. No one despairs more deeply than parents who see their child precede them in death. People live in this fleeting world where all is uncertainty and impermanence, yet day and night they think only of how much wealth they can amass in this life. From dawn to dusk they concentrate on worldly affairs, and neither revere the Buddha nor take faith in the Law. They ignore Buddhist practice and lack wisdom, idling their days away. And when they die and are brought before the court of Emma, the king of hell, what can they carry as provisions on the long journey through the threefold world? What can they use as a boat or raft to ferry themselves across the sea of the sufferings of birth and death to the land of Actual Reward or the land of Tranquil Light? When one is deluded, it is as if he were dreaming. And when one is enlightened, it is as if he had awakened. Thinking in this way, Sessen Doji resolved to awake from the dream of the transient world and to seek the reality of enlightenment. So he secluded himself in the mountains and devoted himself to deep meditation, sweeping away the dust of delusion in his single-minded pursuit of the Buddhist Law.



The god Taishaku looked down from heaven and observed Sessen Doji in the distance. He thought to himself, "Though the baby fish are many, there are few that grow up to be big fish. Though the flowers of the mango tree are many, there are few that turn into fruit. In like manner, there are many people who set their hearts on enlightenment, but only a few who continue their practice and in fact attain the true Way. The aspiration for enlightenment in common mortals is often hindered by evil influences and easily swayed by circumstances; though many warriors don armor, few go without fear into battle. Let me go test this young man's faith." So saying,

Taishaku disguised himself as a demon and appeared at Sessen Doji's side.

At that time the Buddha had not yet made his appearance in the world, and although Sessen Doji had sought everywhere for the Mahayana teachings, he had been unable to learn anything of them. Just then he heard a faint voice saying, "All is changeable, nothing is constant. This is the law of birth and death." Sessen Doji looked all around in amazement, but there was no one in sight except a demon standing nearby. In appearance it was fierce and horrible; the hairs on its head were like flames and the teeth in its mouth like swords, and its eyes were fixed on Sessen Doji in a furious glare. When Sessen Doji saw this, he was not frightened in the least. He was so overjoyed at the opportunity to hear something of the Buddhist teaching that he did not even question it. He was like a calf separated from its mother that hears the faint sound of her lowing. "Who spoke that verse? There must be more!" he thought, and once more he searched all around, but still there was no one to be seen. He wondered if it could have been the demon who recited the verse. But on second thought that seemed impossible, since the demon must have been born a demon in retribution for some evil act in the past. The verse was certainly a teaching of the Buddha, and he was sure it could never have come from the mouth of a lowly demon. But as there was no one else about, he asked, "Was it you who preached that verse?" "Don't speak to me!" replied the demon. "I've had nothing to eat for days. I'm starved, exhausted, and almost out of my mind. I may have uttered some sort of nonsense, but in my dazed condition I don't even know what it was."

"For me to hear only the first half of that verse," said Sessen Doji, "is like seeing only half the moon or obtaining half a jewel. It must have been you who spoke, so I beg you to teach me the remaining half." The demon replied sarcastically, "You are already enlightened, so you should feel no resentment even if you don't hear the rest of the verse. I'm dying of starvation and haven't the strength to speak--say no more to me!"

"Could you teach me if you had something to eat?" asked Sessen Doji. "If I had something to eat, I might be able to," said the demon. Elated, Sessen Doji said, "Well then, what kind of food would you like?" But the demon replied, "Ask no more. You will certainly be horrified when you hear what I eat. Besides, you would never be able to provide it."

Yet Sessen Doji was insistent. "If you will just tell me what you want, I will try to find it for you." The demon answered, "I eat only the tender flesh of humans and drink only their warm blood. I fly through the air far and wide in search of food, but people are protected by the Buddhas and gods so that even though I want to kill them, I cannot. I can only kill and eat those whom the Buddhas and gods have forsaken."

Hearing this, Sessen Doji decided to give his own body for the sake of the Law, so that he could hear the entire verse. "Your food is right here," he said. "You need look no further. Since I am still alive, my flesh is warm, and my blood has had no time to turn cold. Therefore, I ask you to teach me the rest of the verse, and in exchange, I will offer you my body." Then the demon grew furious and demanded, "Who could believe your words? After I've taught you the rest of the verse, who can I call on as a witness to make you keep your promise?"

Sessen Doji replied, "This body of mine is mortal. But if I give my life for the Law, casting away this vile body which would otherwise die in vain, in the next life I will certainly be able to attain enlightenment and become a Buddha. I will receive a pure and wonderful body. It will be like throwing away a piece of crockery and receiving a precious vessel in exchange. I call upon Bonten and Taishaku, the Four Heavenly Kings, and all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions to be my witnesses. I could not possibly deceive you before them."

The demon, somewhat mollified, said, "If what you say is true, I will teach you the rest of the verse." Sessen Doji was overjoyed and, removing his deerskin garment, spread it out for the demon to sit upon while he preached. Then Sessen Doji knelt, bowed his head to the ground and placed his palms together in reverence, saying, "All I ask is that you teach me the rest of the verse." Thus he offered his heartfelt respect to the demon. The demon, seating himself on the deerskin, then recited these words: "Extinguishing the cycle of birth and death, one enters the joy of nirvana." The moment he heard this, Sessen Doji was filled with joy, and his reverence for the verse was boundless. Resolved to remember it even until the next life, he repeated it over and over again and etched it deep in his heart.

He pondered, thinking to himself, "I rejoice that this verse, [though it came from a demon,] is no different from the teaching of the Buddha, but at the same time, I lament that I alone have heard it and that I am unable to transmit it to others." Thereupon he inscribed the stanza on stones, cliff faces and the trees along the road, and he prayed that those who might later pass by would see it, understand its meaning and finally enter the true Way. This done, he climbed a tall tree and threw himself down before the demon. But before he had reached the ground, the demon quickly resumed his original form as Taishaku, caught Sessen Doji and gently placed him on a level spot. Bowing before him reverently, Taishaku said, "In order to test you, I held back the Buddha's holy teaching for a time, causing anguish in the heart of a bodhisattva. I hope you will forgive my fault and save me without fail in my next life."

Then all of the heavenly beings gathered around to praise Sessen Doji, saying, "How wonderful! He is truly a bodhisattva." Thus, by casting away his body to listen to half a verse, Sessen Doji was able to transcend the realm of birth and death for twelve kalpas. This story appears in the Nirvana Sutra.

In the past Sessen Doji was willing to give his life in order to hear but half a verse. How much more thankful should we be to hear a chapter or even a volume of the Lotus Sutra! How can we ever repay such a blessing? Indeed, if you care about your next life, you should make Sessen Doji your example. Even though you may be too poor to offer anything of value, if the opportunity should arise to give up your life for the sake of the Buddhist Law, you should offer your life in order to study Buddhism.

This body of ours in the end will become nothing more than the soil of the hills and fields. Therefore, it is useless to begrudge your life, for though you may wish to, you cannot cling to it forever. Even people who live a long time rarely live beyond the age of one hundred. And all the events of a lifetime are like the dream one dreams in a brief nap. Though one may have been fortunate enough to be born as a human being and may perhaps have even renounced the world in order to seek the truth, if he fails to study Buddhism and to refute its slanderers but simply spends his time in idleness and chatter, then he is no better than an animal dressed in priestly robes. He may call himself a priest and earn his livelihood as such, but in no way does he deserve to be regarded as a true priest. He is nothing but a thief who has stolen the name of priest. How shameful and frightening!



Farewell to a dear friend

Martha Mitchell

May 27, 1938 – December 4, 2009

Her exuberance for life will be greatly missed.