

THE MIDDLE WAY[®]

ADVOCATING THE TRUE TEACHINGS OF NICHIREN THE TRUE BUDDHA

WINTER

2014

THE THIRD DAY OF THE NEW YEAR¹

I received the sixty steamed rice cakes, one container of refined sake, fifty yams, twenty koji oranges and one string of dried persimmons that you so kindly sent. I placed these various articles before the Lotus Sutra and presented them as offerings to the sutra on the third day of spring!

Just as flowers open up and bear fruit, just as the moon appears and invariably grows full, just as a lamp becomes brighter when oil is added, and just as plants and trees flourish with rain, so will human beings never fail to prosper when they make good causes.

Moreover, the sincerity you showed in celebrating the third day of the new year exceeds even the sincerity you showed in commemorating the first day. The steamed rice cakes are like the full moon. I will write of other matters later.

Nichiren

The eleventh day of the first month in the third year of Koan
(1280), Cyclical sign kanoe-tatsu
To Lord Ueno, Nanjo Tokimitsu
Jan 11, 1280

¹ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 7, p. 191

ON LOVE, FORGIVENESS & COMPASSION

Reverend Raidō Hirota
Bucks County, Pennsylvania
June 2012



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The Middle Way

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QUESTION: Christianity is based on the ideas of divine love and forgiveness. What is the Buddhist view on love and forgiveness?

Reverend Raido Hirota (RH): Forgiveness means to forgive and accept others. Love means to adore and hold them dear. In Christianity, didn't god sacrifice himself; and does he not love and take care of people equally? Isn't that correct?

Children are adorable. But if you give them toys and allow them to eat only the things they want to eat, and do not teach them rules or proper behavior just because they are adorable, then they will grow up to become people who can't live in society. In other words, "love" is not just something good. It can also lead to chaos and debauchery. There are some children who have developed the characteristic of distrusting others because their parents raised them to believe that sternness is love.

Forgiveness and love are multi-faceted, having aspects of good, bad, and confusion. How forgiveness and love are interpreted differs depending on each individual. Forgiveness and love are different from the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō² because they are not absolute. In Christianity, because god loved the world he sacrificed himself for the salvation of mankind, and therefore loves and takes care of people equally. If that is true, then why won't the wars that kill each other vanish from this world?

It's because there is inconsistency and falseness in their teaching. One cannot accept misguided religions, because by accepting them we could be tricked into believing that they

² Namumyōhōrengekyō – the Mystic Law which enlightens all Buddhas; the Supreme Law of life and the universe; the Buddha-nature in all things.

are correct. If a person realizes that the teaching is wrong, stops believing in that teaching, and starts believing in the true teaching, then Nichiren Daishonin's³ teachings will allow his heart to be revealed or to be opened. But if you still accept a teaching that is wrong, the one who forgives that is committing slander.

QUESTION: A dear friend of mine recently died after a twenty year battle with a rare disease. Although she never chanted daimoku⁴, she was wise, confident, compassionate, and never hesitated to help those in need. Is there a need to chant daimoku when one lives a life in accordance with Namumyōhōrengekyō?

RH: When I visit someone who is dealing with illness, I always say: "While you are resting in bed because you are ill, and are feeling helpless to do anything about your pain, suffering, and unrest, and if the religion, money, social status, wife, children, etc. that you have connected yourself to in this life aren't your absolute anchor right now, say an Odaimoku Namumyōhōrengekyō aloud—even whispering it is fine. The Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō is not something to make your sickness or your troubles go away, nor is it for you to ask for help or ask to be saved, or to be protected. It's not something to cling to. Namumyōhōrengekyō is the only teaching that explains that within our lives is the life that is equally precious as Buddha's life. Yet, just because you chanted Namumyōhōrengekyō, doesn't mean that you have to take faith in this teaching. Nevertheless, without fail, by chanting, the Buddha's life, that resides deep within your heart but has been frozen due to apprehension, will slowly melt and bring out your courageous spirit." What's important is that the person chants Namumyōhōrengekyō, and he himself develops a relationship with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Even Mother Teresa, who was the quintessential example of charity and compassion in this world, would not have been able to attain Buddhahood unless she chanted Namumyōhōrengekyō.



³ Nichiren Daishonin – Daishonin – (1222-1282) the true Buddha who realized the Mystic Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō imbedded in the Lotus Sutra and established the Law as the means by which all living beings can become enlightened.

⁴ Daimoku – Odaimoku – chanting⁴ Namumyōhōrengekyō, the title of the Lotus Sutra.

DISCUSSION

A BUDDHA UNDERSTANDS THE NATURE OF ALL PHENOMENA

Reverend Raidō Hirota
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QUESTION: What does it mean that a Buddha understands the true nature of all phenomena?

RH: In the Lotus Sutra⁵, it describes the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō as the spine of all things that exists in this world (*Ichinen Sanzen*⁶). That's why it's described as "the true entity of all phenomena."

When we explain the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, we refer to *shoho jisso*⁷. *Shoho* means all laws in the universe. *Jisso* refers to the manifestation of all phenomena. Namumyōhōrengekyō is the foremost Law among all laws. Buddha understands the essence of all matter. Air, fire, water, sound and the mind of human beings – everything is called *shoho*. And each of these *shoho* is not separate or disconnected. They are related and connected, one to the other by Namumyōhōrengekyō. This is very easy to put into words, but very difficult to understand.

A long time ago, no one knew that the air existed scientifically because no one could see the air. Nowadays, we understand that the air exists even though we do not see it. Very similar to the existence of air is the existence of the mind, because we cannot see either of them. I would like to link my discussion of Namumyōhōrengekyō to a discussion of air. The air envelopes the earth, surrounding it with a thickness of about 80 kilometers (50 miles). The air can be thick, or at times thin. It is all one element surrounding the earth. It is not divided into ten or twenty categories. It's all one unit. Air also doesn't discriminate against anyone or anything. It is there for everyone to breathe, no matter who or what it is. Whether you pay taxes or not, the air is equally available. What the air has in common with Namumyōhōrengekyō is that they both are essential to all phenomena. We human beings tend to think that the air we breathe belongs to us, or is only for us alone. But we must inhale and exhale the same air that persons we don't like inhale and exhale because the air is all one. The air can also have a negative effect. It can be the cause of death. For instance, by drowning in water, or suffocating, the lack of air can cause one to lose one's life. Scientists have found that the air we breathe exists only in the earth's atmosphere, but they don't know whether it exists on other planets in different solar systems throughout the universe. That

⁵ Lotus Sutra - the highest teaching that Shakyamuni Buddha taught in the last eight years of his life. It reveals that all life has Buddha-nature, and that the life of Buddha and all life are eternal.

⁶ Ichinen Sanzen – a single life moment contains three thousand realms of existence (or a single life moment contains all of existence)

⁷ Shoho jisso – true entity of all phenomena – “the ultimate truth or reality that permeates all changing phenomena and is in no way separate from them.”

notwithstanding, I said that the air was like Namumyōhōrengekyō, because like air, Namumyōhōrengekyō exists in all animals, all plants, and everything that exists on this earth. But unlike the air we breathe, Namumyōhōrengekyō exists in planets and all solar systems throughout the entire universe. It is essential to everything. The existence of Namumyōhōrengekyō is what is referred to as *shōhō* (“true entity”).

In Christianity, they speak about how the world and humans were created. In Buddhism we do not talk about how or what created the world. We don’t speak about creation at all. We say our existence is dependent on or contingent upon the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, the Law of the Lotus Sutra.

Believer 1 (B1): Because the Buddha understands Namumyōhōrengekyō, the Law of the Lotus Sutra, that Law encompasses everything, just like the air covers the entire earth, that is why the Buddha understands the nature of all phenomena. Because he understands the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō is related to everything, therefore the Buddha understands everything. Is that correct?

RH: Yes, you’re right. But the word and connotation of “understanding” is more like comprehension through intellectualization and analysis, whereas from the religious perspective you maintain faith and live your belief with Namumyōhōrengekyō. This is a little different from an intellectual understanding. Buddha didn’t only realize and understand the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, he held on to firm belief in the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and lived with the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō as his way of life.

The question above says that the “Buddha understands,” but actually Shakyamuni⁸ did not state all that we are discussing here. Over 2200 years after Shakyamuni’s passing, Nichiren Daishonin taught us what we are studying now. So actually Shakyamuni Buddha did not teach us; Nichiren did. Nichiren Daishonin taught *kuon ganjo*⁹, *honninmyō*¹⁰, *ichinen sanzen*. *Kuon* means eternal. *Ganjo* means very beginning. *Hon* (of *honninmyō*) means fundamental or principal. *In* (of *honninmyō*) means cause or reason. And *myō* (of *honninmyō*), which is the same *myō* of Namumyōhōrengekyō means the nature of the Law. *Ichinen* (of *ichinen sanzen*) means a single moment. *Sanzen* means three thousand. So these words taught by Nichiren Daishonin – *kuon ganjo*, *honninmyō*, *ichinen sanzen* – indicate the origin or source of all life. The Gohonzon¹¹ that we believe in and practice to represents *kuon ganjo*, *honninmyō*, *ichinen sanzen*. Nichiren Daishonin is the individual who taught us the origin of life. Nichiren is the founder of Nichiren Shoshu¹². We call him True Buddha (*honbutsu*¹³). Shakyamuni did not teach *kuon ganjo*, *honninmyō*, *ichinen sanzen* in the Lotus Sutra or in any of his other sutras.

⁸ Shakyamuni – Shakyamuni Buddha – Siddhartha Gautama Buddha (1029BCE – 949BCE), the historical founder of Buddhism on this earth.

⁹ *Kuon ganjo* – time without beginning

¹⁰ *Honninmyō* – true or original cause – the original or fundamental Law which enables all Buddhas to become enlightened.

¹¹ *Gohonzon* – the object of worship of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which represents the universal Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō and the Buddha nature in all things.

¹² Nichiren Shoshu – a sect of Buddhism that embraces and recites the true Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō as the original cause of enlightenment and believes in Nichiren Daishonin as the true Buddha.

¹³ *Honbutsu* – original Buddha

So we call him a provisional Buddha (*shakubutsu*¹⁴). *Shaka* means shadow. Shakyamuni is a shadow of Nichiren. Nichiren is the True Buddha. This is the essence of the nature of the True Buddha.

B1: The question says “a Buddha understands the nature of all phenomena.” It’s not only referring to Nichiren Daishonin, but to any Buddha. So what you’ve just explained is that Nichiren Daishonin not only understood and lived it, but he left behind the true nature of all existence. He was able to completely define it, whereas Shakyamuni could not do that. But even though Shakamuni could not state it and define the origin of life, is it true that he and all Buddhas still perceive the true nature of all phenomena, even though it is not their mission to transmit it?

RH: The word Buddha here refers to not only Shakyamuni Buddha, but to an infinite number of Buddhas. Anyone who is ever referred to as a Buddha, or is called Buddha, is a person who understands the essence of the Lotus Sutra (or the essentials of the Lotus Sutra) – the Laws of the Lotus Sutra. That’s what it says in the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, Amida Buddha¹⁵, Dainichi Buddha¹⁶, Yakushi Buddha¹⁷, Bodhisattva Kannon¹⁸, Bodhisattva Miroku¹⁹, and Shakyamuni Buddha are prayed to separately in Japan, with separate temples and shrines dedicated to each of them. However, their origin is actually the Law of the Lotus Sutra, Namumyōhōrengekyō. So all of them are related.

What prompted you to become a Buddhist?

B2: I was raised a Christian. I always lived as a Christian. Always went to church, etc. but I realized it wasn’t doing anything for me. When I was 15, I realized that I had to take my life into my own hands. After learning about Buddhism in school, I began researching Buddhism. When I did searches on the Internet, I only found information related to Nichiren Buddhism. I finally went to a Buddhist meeting. It was the Soka Gakkai²⁰. They wanted me to get Gohonzon right away. I got their Gohonzon, but I didn’t know anything about the religion. Is that okay?

RH: Though it is Namumyōhōrengekyō that is written, the meaning of it is, as I mentioned, *kuon ganjo, honninmyō, ichinen sanzen*. Nichiren Daishonin was almost executed by the Japanese government, and then exiled to Sado Island. After being released he retired to Mount Minobu in Yamanashi Prefecture in eastern Japan. He endured all kinds of hardship

¹⁴ Shakubutsu – provisional Buddha

¹⁵ Amida Buddha – Infinite Life or Infinite Light Buddha who is said to reside in the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss in the Western region of the universe.

¹⁶ Dainichi Buddha – a Buddha of the esoteric teachings who, it is said, is always in this world teaching the law.

¹⁷ Yakushi Buddha – the Buddha of Medicine, or the Buddha of Healing, the Buddha of the Pure Emerald World in the east.

¹⁸ Bodhisattva Kannon – “He who Perceives the Sounds of the World” – a bodhisattva who assumes 33 different forms and manifests himself anywhere in the world to save people from suffering and danger.

¹⁹ Bodhisattva Miroku – (Skt. Maitreya) – a bodhisattva predicted to be the successor of Shakyamuni as a future Buddha.

²⁰ Soka Gakkai – SGI – Soka Gakkai International – a lay organization that wrongly incorporates some of the doctrine of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism into its own philosophy and practice.

and troubles because of his beliefs. Later, his disciples and followers in Atushara experienced the same or similar trials and tribulations as Nichiren carried out by the Japanese government, even though they had different backgrounds, different professions and a different way of life. Nichiren came to realize that these disciples were living Namumyōhōrengekyō just as he was. Once he recognized the depth of faith of his followers, he realized it was time to inscribe the object of worship of the high sanctuary (*kaidan no honzon*). This is the Dai-Gohonzon. It was inscribed in the second year of *Koan* (1279) after the Daishonin had practiced Buddhism with his whole life, despite being in danger. So to give Gohonzon to someone – anyone – who does not know the true meaning of the religion and the true purpose of practice, like the Soka Gakkai does, is very, very wrong.

Taisekiji²¹ has determined that the object of worship of the high sanctuary is the most important Gohonzon. Taisekiji insists that wherever the object of worship of the high sanctuary is, that is the place with the right faith. They do not consider the history of the *kaidan no honzon* and how it came to appear in this world. They just blindly believe in the face value of the *kaidan no honzon*.

Let's go back to the air metaphor. We can't see the air, but in school teachers teach students what the air is through chemistry using the Periodic Table: O = oxygen and N = nitrogen. The word "air" is written on the blackboard, so it seems that it exists only on the blackboard. But when you erase the word "air," the air still exists. However, the word "air" written on the blackboard doesn't show what the air is, and O (oxygen) and N (nitrogen) written on the blackboard isn't equal to the air, because even if we were to erase these words, the air would still exist. The only reason the teacher writes these words on the blackboard is to teach students who do not know or understand what the air is. In the same manner, the Gohonzon was written to teach people who do not understand the Law. Even if you do not have a Gohonzon, it still exists. The true meaning of the Gohonzon is *kuon ganjo, honninmyō, ichinen sanzen*. The Gohonzon was inscribed to teach people who do not realize its meaning. The writing in itself does not have any meaning. It's the equivalent of "air" or "O" or "N" written on a blackboard.

Nichiren attained a realization, and his disciples did the same. Nichiren wrote his realization out in the form of Gohonzon. If you direct your prayers to the tangible Gohonzon like Taisekiji instructs, that is not a real prayer. You must direct your prayers to the spirit of the Gohonzon because it was written as a result of Nichiren having attained a realization, and later recognition that his followers were experiencing the same hardships and depth of faith as he himself. That is the true religion and the true practice of this faith. Of course it is very important to keep and protect the tangible Gohonzon. But the real practice of Buddhism should be to keep and protect the Gohonzon in your heart. One could protect the Gohonzon by simply putting it in a safe. That would be protecting it as tangible matter. But actually, that is not the way to protect Gohonzon. To protect Gohonzon as a religious practice you have to place it in front of you and send prayers to keep it and protect it in your heart. Otherwise you cannot say that you keep or protect Gohonzon.



²¹ Taisekiji – the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu – her it refers to the organization of Nichiren Shoshu (NST).

THE CORRECT FACE OF BUDDHISM

Reverend Raidō Hirota

International Meeting

July 2012

QUESTIONS: How should we act while being a Buddhist in Western society? People think we should act a certain way.

RH: I'm aware that you are having a hard time in the States being a Buddhist. I live in Japan, I am Japanese and I'm a Buddhist too, but at times I still struggle with it. So no matter where you are, you have to deal with the culture of the country where you reside. The way I handle it is to talk about it with the person who judges you because you practice this religion, or practice in a way that is different from what is commonly accepted. This presents an opportunity for you to explain true Buddhism and give a correct understanding of Buddhism.

In Japan, when I go to a department store I sometimes run into believers who say to me, "Oh wow, you're a priest, and you still shop?" Or if I tell a believer about something I saw on television, they will ask, "You watch television?" As though because I'm a priest, I shouldn't shop, or shouldn't watch TV. These are questions that even surprise me. Unlike in the States, in Japan there are many people who are Buddhist, so it is a challenge to show the correct face of Buddhism even in this culture.

B3: On my job we were asked to list a few things people didn't know about us. I included on my list that I was a Buddhist. I think a lot of people were surprised. The interesting thing that happened after they found out that I was a Buddhist is that many people said hello to me in a different way. They say, "Oh, you're a Buddhist. That's cool!" There is definitely a certain perception, or misconception, or persona that goes along with the word "Buddhist" in this country. At least in my work environment I got a lot of positive feedback. But there were also some people who were surprised because I don't necessarily act in a way that fits their notion of a "Buddhist."

RH: Some of the common questions I get are: "You don't eat meat, right?" or "You're not married, correct?" And I respond, "I do eat meat, and I am married." When people ask you questions like that because they have an image of what you should be, or how you should act as a Buddhist, you explain what is right or what is wrong about their understanding of Buddhism. In Nichiren Daishonin's teachings the only precept is to believe in the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō, and believe that you can attain Buddhahood by believing and practicing this Law, and don't have a wandering heart that flirts with other laws or beliefs. This is the only precept of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. This is what you should explain to anyone who asks you, or comments on your way of life.

B3: In other Buddhisms such as Zen or Tibetan Buddhism and others they do have the precepts of not marrying, not eating meat and various other things. In fact, they have

hundreds of precepts. So in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is that the only precept, to believe in Namumyōhōrengekyō?

RH: Yes, that is the only thing you need to follow in Nichiren Shoshu. The reason there is only one precept is because a person cannot live unless he/she decides this is how I am going to live. For example, if there are hundreds of precepts, and they follow those, they are doing it because that's what they're supposed to do. It's not coming from their heart. They're just following it. In Nichiren Daishonin's teaching that doesn't make sense. The point is to control yourself. Do it on your own. You decide. It's a commitment to yourself. It's not because someone told you to do it.

B4: There's a flaw in that argument. If Buddhism is not telling you the way to be a human being, there's nothing for you to aspire to. You can live your life however you want. There has to be something within the teachings that encourages you to improve the quality of the way that you behave.

RH: In some Buddhisms they say you can't drink alcohol. The reason they say that is because if you drink a lot you won't be able to practice. So they have a precept that you can't drink at all; not even a little bit. But if you have self control, you can say I can have one drink. That's not going to affect my practice. If you can stop right there, then you can control yourself. That is the best thing. Because you are thinking for yourself and you are deciding on your own. And you're following what you say you're going to do.

It is the same with eating meat. All life is equal. It is the same one life of Namumyōhōrengekyō. Thus an animal's life and the life of a cabbage is the same thing. So to say that taking an animal's life is not good, but eating cabbage is okay makes no sense. But as Buddhism evolved and began to attract more and more people after its inception, they had to create rules so that they could manage an expanding group of people. Therefore, those rules or precepts became the stereotype for what Buddhists should be or how Buddhists should act. Based on that common view, when you tell people you are a Buddhist, they might have ideas about how you should be. But applying self-control is more inline with our practice.

B1: What is underlying everything within our life and all life is the core which is the Buddha-nature. I think by aspiring to open that Buddha nature there is a certain conduct that one realizes they want to exhibit. One wants to be a better person. Isn't that part of the Buddha-nature? In some Buddhisms, and also in other religions it seems, there are different levels. The higher you reach, the more pious you're supposed to become. But isn't that wrong? Because things that are natural in life shouldn't be eliminated. There must be a reason why these things are a part of human life. One should be able to experience and understand the full spectrum of what it means to be human without having to give things up. The underlying thing is the core of Buddhahood that runs through everything. Encouraging you to become a better person, I would think.

RH: Within the Ten Worlds²² the world of Humanity – the life of human beings – is in the middle. So from Humanity you look up and you look down. Looking up, one seeks to attain Buddhahood. Looking down, one teaches others how to attain Buddhahood. That is your responsibility as a practitioner, says Nichiren Daishonin. The people who attend these meetings are all pioneers. When people come up to you and you tell them you are a Buddhist, tell them what the correct teachings is in a way they can understand. At the same time, you have to train yourselves so that you become the right person to teach this Buddhism. You have to be a pioneer for yourself as well as to the rest of the world. However, you can't just say, I know this; let me teach you what I know. You have to be ever humble, and learn how to be a good practitioner, while at the same time, correcting and guiding others in a way so that they don't have any misconceptions about Buddhism and Buddhists.

B4: I read in the gosho²³ that it's our behavior as a human being that determines one's enlightenment. I think there is negative behavior and positive behavior. There must be a behavior which encourages the Buddha nature to become stronger. Is there a form of behavior that we should aspire to? Nichiren Daishonin wrote to Shijo Kingo, who had a very short temper, that a short tempered person would not have their prayers answered. The Buddhist gods would not protect a short tempered person. So already the Daishonin is indicating a certain behavior that we have to work towards. So as human beings we should not be short tempered. Are there other behaviors we should aspire to? This is the sort of thing I would like to know.

RH: As I explained, in Nichiren Shoshu there are no precepts except the one to believe in and practice the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō exclusively. Shijo Kingo was short tempered, but not everyone is short tempered, so the warning Nichiren Daishonin gave to Shijo Kingo does not apply to everyone. Therefore, whatever you aspire to will be different for each person. What you aspire to will be different from what Believer 1 or Believer 2, or Believer 3 aspires to. The point is to look at your own behavior, assess it on your own, and decide what you need to change, or what you need to strive for and aspire to. You have to self-reflect. There are no rules other than the one of believing in and practicing Namumyōhōrengekyō that you are supposed to follow.

Nichiren Daishonin says that the Law of Namumyōhōrengekyō seems like an easy thing to follow, but it is the most difficult practice. But once you take faith, even if you want to break the bond, it is unbreakable and unshakable.

B3: It seems that we are talking about taking responsibility for our actions and behavior, and continually trying to deepen our connection, our faith and belief in Namumyōhōrengekyō, and making that the driving force behind all our interactions in our life. It seems like common sense can tell us what correct behavior is. I think there is something nagging at us—at least me. There is something nagging at me when I'm not making correct decisions. For example, I've often struggled over the many years just trying to

²² Ten Worlds – potential conditions of life inherent in each individual. They are: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven or Bliss, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva, and Buddhahood.

²³ Gosho – the individual and collective writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

have a consistent practice. Having consistent gongyo²⁴ and daimoku. It's an internal battle. I continually wage this battle. I do gongyo everyday. But everyday I have to summon up the strength to win over my attitudes and bad habits. Shijo Kingo had a short temper. I have a give up attitude. That's my battle.

RH: Before you quit, and then think about it, I want you to think it about it first, before you quit. This teaching is a confrontation with yourself and not with other people. Even for myself, many times I don't want to do gongyo in the morning or in the evening. But then I summon my courage and do it. So it's like any battle, without courage there is no action.

Earlier I mentioned that people ask me, "Oh you shop, oh you're married, and oh you eat meat?" They also say to me, "Because you're a priest, you have a clear mind. You don't get confused or lost." Of course that's not true. I'm human. But in the end, because I'm committed to studying and having faith in Namumyōhōrengekyō, I choose to live as a person who practices this teaching. In Japanese there is a phrase that means you have multiple feelings and thoughts but you cut them off. You think about them to a certain point—I want this, I want that, etc.—but you can't live your life that way. Because we have Namumyōhōrengekyō, we focus on Namumyōhōrengekyō, putting all our energy into that, and live based on that.

Ultimately, the way to live is to live a life worthy of having Buddha-nature within you. You are the only person who knows what you have to change to be the person worthy of hosting Buddha-nature. It is different for everyone. No one can tell you what that is. You have to realize what it is that you have to change to be the person who is worthy enough to have the Buddha nature within. The point is not to impress others, or to garner praise. It is to live at your highest potential, striving to be your truest self, so that you don't feel embarrassed about being the way that you are. That's much different from living as an adult in society with common sense. It has a much deeper, richer meaning.



²⁴ Gongyo – the daily practice of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism which entails the morning and evening recitation of the 2nd and 16th chapters of the Lotus Sutra and chanting Namumyōhōrengekyō.

GOSHO SELECTION

JOZO AND JOGEN²⁵

I have received one sack of unpolished rice, one basket of melons, some yams and various other gifts.

Once there was a person who exerted himself in the service of a wealthy man named Rakutoku. Day and night he, his wife and their children were treated harshly and driven hard. Unable to bear the excessive ill-treatment, he hid himself and fled to another country. After serving for a time in the court of a great king in that country, he became an influential retainer and eventually the chief minister to the king. Later, employing the might of this country, he defeated the country where his former master resided. At that time, seeing this chief minister, the former master was greatly frightened and regretted his ill-treatment. Placing himself in the service of the chief minister, he brought him various treasures. And, with no thought for the defeat he had experienced, he now strove only to ensure that his life would be spared.

The case of the Lotus Sutra is the same. The Lotus Sutra is the master of Yakushi Buddha in the east, as well as the master of all Buddhas in the south, west, north and the worlds above and below. Shakyamuni Buddha and the other Buddhas revere the characters of the Lotus Sutra in the same way that people fear their sovereign and the stars venerate the moon.

We ordinary persons, however, have long been under the influence of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. We have been forced into confinement in the realms of hell, hungry spirits and animals, and, without a moment of relief, day and night we are tortured by the wardens of hell. Even so, if we could somehow place ourselves under the protection of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha and the Buddhas of the ten directions would treat us as their children, and thus even the heavenly kings Bonten and Taishaku would refrain from approaching us out of fear. How much more, then, would the Devil of the Sixth Heaven fear us! Even though the devil king had formerly been our master, he would now stand in reverential awe of us. And, terribly fearful that should he cause trouble for us, his situation would worsen when he presented himself to the Lotus Sutra and the Buddhas of the ten directions, he would make us offerings. For this reason he spares no effort whatsoever to prevent all the living beings of the six paths from accepting the Lotus Sutra.

Therefore, how could this be? You have taken pity on Nichiren, who is hated by all people, sending various articles all the way to me in these mountains on more than just one or two occasions. This is no ordinary matter. Indeed, Shakyamuni Buddha himself may have entered your body. Or perhaps your deceased son has become a Buddha and, in order to guide his father and mother, has entered your hearts.

²⁵ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 7, p. 211

King Myoshogon was an evil king. However, because his two sons, Jozo and Jogen, guided him to the way, he and his wife were both able to place their trust in the Lotus Sutra and become Buddhas. Mysteriously enough, your own circumstances are much the same.

Kai-ko said: "He [the deceased son] was above the ordinary in both features and form. In addition, he was honest at heart and rich in wisdom. I felt it a terrible pity that someone such as he, outstanding in every respect, should die so young. Reconsidering the matter, however, I realized that it was because of this boy's death that his mother became a seeker of the way and his father began to practice, praying for his repose. How marvelous, I thought. Moreover, the fact that they have put their trust in the Lotus Sutra, which all people detest, must mean that their deceased son has been at their side and encouraged them to do so." I also believe this to be the case.

Before, I had thought that your sincerity was just an ordinary matter, but now, for the first time, I have sensed the depth of your faith. If anything should happen to you, just as the moon emerges to shine in the dark night, so the five characters of Myōhōrengekyō will appear as a moon for you. Be convinced that Shakyamuni Buddha, the Buddhas of the ten directions and the son who preceded you in death will appear in this moon.

I will explain in greater detail on another occasion.

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The seventh day of the seventh month
Jul 7, 1280
To Lord Matsuno

