

# Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism



The Hoando at the Head Temple Taisekiji, Japan

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Although some Buddhist and non-Buddhist faiths acknowledge the validity of other religious paths and some accept the premise that most religions essentially strive for the same end, Nichiren Shoshu teaches that there is only one valid path, and that path is a practice based on an incomparable object of worship that embodies both the pristine origins of the end and the end itself. Relying on a step-by-step summary of the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren Daishonin, this booklet explains - for those willing to explore this practice - why the path of Nichiren Daishonin, as preserved by Nichiren Shoshu, should be considered superior to all others.

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## SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

Buddhism is generally considered to be a religion founded by Shakyamuni Buddha in the foothills of the Himalayan Mountains, south of central Nepal. Modern scholars have concluded that Shakyamuni lived around 500 to 600 B.C., but threads of Buddhist ecclesiastic tradition hold that he actually lived much earlier, around 1,000 B.C. Regardless of which estimate is most accurate, however, most would agree that, when Shakyamuni began to advance Buddhist principles, Brahmanism had a substantial influence on that area of the world.

Under Brahman theology, each person possessed a transmigratory soul, storing the remnants of good and bad actions from many past lifetimes. The accumulated characteristics of this soul determined if one was predestined for a life in the preeminent clergy; noble and warrior; merchant and artisan; or slave and servant castes. There was also a belief associated with Brahmanism, which held that an individual could break free from the transmigratory soul through union with the underlying essence of the universe, called Brahma.(1) Their religious observances included accepting and diligently fulfilling one's duties as a member of a caste, worshiping deities who served as functionaries of Brahma, respecting and supporting the role of the clergy, ritualistic bathing, animal sacrifices, and austerities that ranged from self-denial to severe asceticism.

Shakyamuni's given name was Siddhartha Gautama. He was born a Prince in the Shakya clan, and raised with many of the advantages of royal life, including a stately home and a sound education. He was also considered to be deeply concerned about the human condition. Eventually, due to his concern for humanity and, of course, the influence of Brahmanism, he came to the conclusion that the primary suffering shared by all people was the perpetual cycle of birth, aging, sickness and death. Compelled by this awareness, he left his father's kingdom in pursuit of a way to overcome these four universal sufferings.

After years of sustained effort that included meditation and a period of severe physical deprivation, followed by a much more moderate practice, he reached a turning point in his quest. While meditating under a tree outside the city of Gaya, at about age thirty Shakyamuni attained what is commonly referred to as enlightenment. Although enlightenment is difficult to explain because, by definition, it goes beyond comprehension, it can be said, based on a study of Shakyamuni's teachings, that his entire being was permanently enveloped at that moment by a profound realm that came from within himself, that simultaneously pervaded all existence, and was so majestic and omnipotent that it could be none other than the fundamental basis for all life's functions. From the perspective of his Buddhahood, which was considered much deeper than anything previously experienced by Brahman sages, Shakyamuni was able to appreciate the primary interrelation of all existence, past and future

lifetimes, the absolute pure core of each human being, and a way for all humanity to alleviate everyday suffering and the sufferings that recur lifetime after lifetime. For the remainder of his historical existence, which lasted about fifty more years, he traveled throughout India, engaging in discourses called sutras, to teach others how they too could attain enlightenment.

During the first month of his ministry, it is believed that Shakyamuni revealed one of the most profound aspects of his enlightenment. That is that all things are interrelated and give rise to one another.

Thereafter, to help his followers abandon worldly desires, he taught the Four Noble Truths, which defined the origins of suffering as cravings for material satisfaction. These Truths further instructed that suffering could be eliminated by strictly following a life based on the Eightfold Path of right view, right thinking, right speech, right action, right way of life, right endeavor, right mindfulness, and right meditation. Through a practice based on these guidelines, which also included detailed rules of conduct, his community of monks were told they could extinguish their desires, find peace of mind, transcend the world of form and attachment, and thereafter attain a preliminary form of enlightenment.

As his teachings evolved, however, Shakyamuni shifted his emphasis from the Eightfold Path and strict rules of conduct, to a more conceptual practice based on the Six Paramitas of almsgiving, keeping the precepts, patience, persistence, meditation and striving for profound wisdom. Around this time he also encouraged the monks

in his entourage to, first, fully embrace the bodhisattva-way by helping others attain enlightenment and, second, to think of karma in much more complex terms than taught by the Brahmans of his day.<sup>(2)</sup> This period was then succeeded by over two decades of instruction on the principal of non-substantiality to clarify that, through the Buddha's eyes, both existence and non-existence must be considered when determining the reality of all things.

Along the way Shakyamuni also referred to the benefits offered by other Buddhas. For example, Amida Buddha (Sanskrit: Amitayus or Amitabhu) was said to reside in the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss located in another galaxy. As an alternative to adhering to austere practices, the monks in attendance during the Amida sutra were told,

... if a good man or woman who hears of Amida Buddha holds fast to his name ... with concentrated and undistracted mind, then, at the hour of death, Amida Buddha will appear before them with a host of holy ones. Consequently, when their life comes to an end, the aspirants' minds will not fall into confusion and so will be born immediately in the land of Utmost Bliss of Amida Buddha.

(Three Pureland Sutras, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed., p. 351)

Another Buddha mentioned by Shakyamuni was Dainichi (Sanskrit: Mahavairochana). According to Shakyamuni, the path to enlightenment of Dainichi Buddha was founded on great compassion, observing the true aspect of one's mind, and rituals that involved hand

gestures, esoteric chants and the worship of an assortment of sacred objects.

During the last eight years of Shakyamuni's life, however, he no longer spoke about Amida and Dainichi Buddhas. And the Four Noble Truths, the Six Paramitas and the doctrine of non-substantiality were referred to only as preliminary lessons. Instead, he focused primarily on teaching the Lotus Sutra. As Shakyamuni explained,

Knowing that all living beings have many kinds of desires deeply attached in their minds, I have, according to their capacity, expounded the laws by various reasonings, parabolic expressions, and tactful powers. Sariputra! Such teachings all are in order to secure perfect knowledge of the One Buddha-vehicle.

(Threefold Lotus Sutra, Weatherhill, p. 61)

The "One Buddha-vehicle" described here was the Lotus Sutra, which Shakyamuni proclaimed to be the supreme teaching of all Buddhas.<sup>(3)</sup> It was also in the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni made his most profound revelation, announcing that he had actually attained enlightenment many lifetimes before his existence in India, after assiduously practicing the bodhisattva-way. This astounded his followers since they had been told for decades that he initially attained Buddhahood during his current existence outside the city of Gaya.<sup>(4)</sup>



Although there are many important teachings in the Lotus Sutra as well as the sutras that complement it, three of the most important are, first, the proclamation that those who embrace the Lotus Sutra can purify their senses and accumulated negative causes without eradicating

earthly desires. This has become known as the principle of transforming earthly desires into enlightenment.<sup>(5)</sup> Second, the revelation that all people, regardless of social class, gender, evil disposition, aptitude or other distinction, can attain Buddhahood.<sup>(6)</sup> And, third, that enlightenment is the manifestation of an eternally compassionate aspect of life, which resides at every moment in the realities of existence.

## **AFTER SHAKYAMUNI**

Shortly after Shakyamuni passed away, his successor presided over a council that was held to recall, recite and confirm the Buddha's teachings. As Buddhism spread into India, similar councils were held about once every hundred years for the next three centuries.

While these efforts at unification were underway, there were also many divisions in the faith. The most significant of these was the schism between the so-called

Hinayana and Mahayana schools. Around the end of the first century B.C., a faction of Buddhists emerged who opposed the mainstream emphasis on attaining personal enlightenment through following strict rules of monastic discipline, based on a literal interpretation of Shakyamuni's earlier teachings. As this opposition movement evolved it became known as Mahayana, meaning great or superior vehicle, while the traditional mainstream school became known as Hinayana, or lesser vehicle. Mahayana was thought to be superior to Hinayana because it sought to unite Buddhism on a more comprehensive level by clarifying the true meaning of Shakyamuni's teachings and by embracing a practice that was not only for one's own enlightenment, but also for the enlightenment of others.(7) By the time the last of Shakyamuni's twenty-four successors was executed for his Buddhist beliefs in the sixth century A.D., Mahayana Buddhism had become widely accepted in India, although Hinayana Buddhism remained a substantial influence.

As Buddhism spread northward into China, T'ien T'ai (Chih-i), a Chinese Buddhist monk who lived in the sixth century, conducted a thorough study of Hinayana and Mahayana sutras found in India, China, and elsewhere. Based on this research and enlightened insight, he classified Shakyamuni's sutras into five periods and eight types of teachings, concluding that the Mahayana teachings were superior to the Hinayana, and that the Lotus Sutra, a Mahayana sutra, was the foremost of them all.(8) Also, using a distinction first recognized in the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, he classified the

pre Lotus Sutra teachings as provisional and the Lotus Sutra as true, with “provisional” referring to temporary and “true” to that which the Buddha designated as eternally valid.

In 804 A.D., a Japanese Buddhist monk by the name of Dengyo traveled to China, mastered T'ien T'ai Buddhism and returned to Japan to reform the Tendai sect based on what he learned. Until shortly after Dengyo's death, Japanese Buddhist priests were ordained under Hinayana precepts.

As Buddhism grew in Japan, its decline in India was becoming apparent. Islamic forces conducted a series of incursions into India from the seventh through the tenth centuries, with a full-scale invasion in the eleventh century. At the same time, Indian Buddhist faiths began to deteriorate under the influence of pre Lotus Sutra teachings, which gradually diminished in their power to help people.

Chinese Buddhism met a similar fate due to the infusion of so many variations of Shakyamuni's earlier teachings. Also influencing the decline of Buddhism in China was the Mongol invasion that began early in the thirteenth century and the acceptance of more traditional philosophies such as Taoism and Confucianism.

It was in this context, over 750 years ago, that Nichiren Daishonin emerged to alter the course of Buddhism for generations to come.

## NICHIREN DAISHONIN

Nichiren Daishonin was born in Japan in 1222.<sup>(9)</sup> His father was a common fisherman. At age twelve, the Daishonin entered a Buddhist temple and, at sixteen, he was ordained a priest. Eventually, after studying Buddhism for a total of twenty years at numerous temples throughout Japan, he reached the conclusion that the Lotus Sutra was supreme among all of Shakyamuni's sutras.

This took a considerable amount of wisdom to unravel, since the Tendai sect established by Dengyo four centuries earlier had succumbed to multiple schisms, thereafter losing its focus on the Lotus Sutra. As a result, sects that relied on Shakyamuni's preliminary sutras dominated Buddhism in Japan. Some required adherence to strict rules of proper behavior and correct eating habits; some developed meditation practices based on Shakyamuni's earlier sutras; others believed in esoteric spells to attain the Way; and another encouraged worship of Amida Buddha, who was said to be more powerful than Shakyamuni. The Zen sect, widely embraced by the samurai class, maintained that enlightenment was not to be found in any of the sutras, but rather in the direct perception of one's mind through meditation.

As Nichiren Daishonin was aware, however, it was only through a belief in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra that one could appreciate the mere preparatory value of Shakyamuni's earlier teachings. Accordingly, religions that based their fundamental doctrine on the earlier

teachings or rejected the sutras entirely were inherently defective and, instead of guiding followers into the tranquility of Buddhahood, were actually reinforcing deluded notions leading to suffering.



Nichiren Daishonin chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo for the first time in April 1253.

At about the same time that the Daishonin became convinced of this correlation, Japan began to experience a series of unusually severe storms, floods, droughts, earthquakes and epidemics. In his treatise, "Rissho Ankoku Ron," Nichiren Daishonin described the situation as follows:

Famine and disease rage more fiercely than ever, beggars are everywhere in sight, and scenes of death fill our eyes. Cadavers pile up in mounds like observation platforms, dead bodies lie side by side like planks on a bridge.

Through the eyes of the Daishonin:

The people of today all turn their backs on what is right; to a man, they give their allegiance to evil. That is the reason why the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation, why sages leave and do not return. And in their stead come devils and demons, disasters and calamities that arise one after another.

(The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin (MWND), vol. two, p. 5)

## **THE LATTER DAY OF THE LAW**

Also important to understanding the role of Nichiren Daishonin is the prophecy in the Lotus Sutra about the Latter Day of the Law. The Latter Day of the Law is an immensely long period of time that was predicted to begin approximately 2,000 years after Shakyamuni's death. At that point the purity of Shakyamuni's teachings was to have been lost and someone other than Shakyamuni was to emerge to teach the true meaning of the Lotus Sutra.<sup>(10)</sup>

Furthermore, it was foretold in considerable detail in the Lotus Sutra that those who embraced this person's teaching would be the recipients of severe persecution, fomented by cunning Buddhist priests. The ensuing oppression would involve mobs yielding swords and makeshift clubs, and government officials imposing repeated sentences of exile.<sup>(11)</sup>

Nichiren Daishonin experienced a series of remarkably similar hardships over a fourteen-year period from 1260 to 1274. Initially, in the summer of 1260, he narrowly escaped assassination at the hands of a mob of several hundred people whipped into a frenzy by opposition priests. When he returned to the same area the following spring, he was wrongfully charged with defamation and banished, without investigation or trial, to the remote peninsula of Izu for a year and nine months.

In another incident, a village steward along with a band of his men ambushed Nichiren Daishonin and a group of the Daishonin's followers. During the fight that ensued, Nichiren Daishonin suffered a sword cut to his forehead and a broken hand. Also, two lay believers who supported him were killed.

Then, in a flurry of incidents during the last part of this fourteen-year period, he was arrested and bludgeoned with the very scroll of the Lotus Sutra predicting such persecutions; charged with treason; narrowly escaped an arbitrary death sentence imposed by a meddling adversary through the appearance of a comet that scared his executioners away; was incarcerated locally for one month; and sent into exile once again. This time confined to the desolate, windswept, snowbound island of Sado for two and a half years.

Nichiren Daishonin recognized the prophetic significance of these persecutions in many of his writings. However, for a full understanding of the ultimate role of

Nichiren Daishonin, it is essential to point out that he also realized he was someone who went far beyond just fulfilling the prophecies of the Lotus Sutra. As explained through the following analogy, this role predated Shakyamuni himself.

## **SHAKYAMUNI'S AND THE DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM COMPARED**

Although Nichiren Daishonin appeared many centuries after Shakyamuni passed away, the Daishonin is considered to be the Buddha of the True Cause, while Shakyamuni is regarded as the Buddha of the True Effect. The “True Cause” referring here to the Buddha who discovers and plants the seeds of Buddhahood, enabling all people to attain enlightenment at the point when they are first influenced to begin practicing with pure faith. The “True Effect” referring to one who appears in a later lifetime as a magnificent Buddha to harvest the fruits of the seeds first planted by the Buddha of the True Cause.

Shakyamuni manifested many of the characteristics associated with one who possessed the full effects of Buddhahood. He was born into royalty. Later in life, he employed spectacular supernatural characteristics and apparitional backdrops to convey the merits of his teachings.

Nichiren Daishonin, on the other hand, was born into a poor family, trained as a common priest, propagated his faith under the most severe conditions, and had only

the unembellished substance of his teachings to convince others of their truth. In this way, he was much more like a Buddha in the original form.

Also, while Shakyamuni's purpose was to activate the seeds of Buddhahood planted in others during a previous lifetime, the Daishonin emphasized that enlightenment actually occurred at the very moment the seed was planted. The problem, however, was that those living in the Latter Day of the Law no longer had the seeds of Buddhahood in their life. As a result, he realized it was up to him to plant them once again.

Furthermore, since this was his role during the modern evolution of Buddhism, Nichiren Daishonin concluded that he must have been the Original Buddha who initially laid the seeds of Buddhahood for Shakyamuni and all others in the far distant past. This principle was clearly expressed in a letter to one of his disciples:

My heart is where all Buddhas enter nirvana; my tongue, where they turn the wheel of doctrine; my throat, where they are born into this world; and my mouth, where they attain enlightenment.[\(12\)](#)

(MWND, vol. one, p. 264)

Nichiren Shoshu teaches, therefore, that at the dawn of time a person with great insight became the first one to attain supreme enlightenment. As a function of this original enlightenment, over countless centuries numerous

bodhisattvas and Buddhas appeared one after the other to plant, nurture and harvest the seeds of Buddhahood. This process culminated with the appearance of Shakyamuni in India approximately three thousand years ago. Then, after Shakyamuni's death and the purity of his teaching was lost, the person who first attained Buddhahood at the dawn of time reappeared in thirteenth century Japan as Nichiren Daishonin to cultivate the barren fields of Buddhahood once again.

For these reasons, Nichiren Daishonin is revered as the Buddha of the True Cause and third person references to Him and His direct successors are, to conform to Nichiren Shoshu publication standards, hereafter capitalized.

## **THE PRACTICE OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM**

At the completion of His training as a priest, Nichiren Daishonin revealed that the fundamental Law of the universe was Myoho Renge Kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra translated from Sanskrit into Chinese. At the same time He established the invocation of His Buddhism as Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. "Nam" means devotion; "Myo" means perfection, mystical, wondrous, and beyond conception; "ho" is Dharma or Law; "Renge" is lotus flower; and "Kyo" is sutra or teaching.

By chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, therefore, one is essentially repeating the phrase: "I express my devotion

to the perfectly endowed Mystic Law of the Lotus Sutra." The lotus is the most fitting of symbols, for one, because at the time of full bloom both the seed and flower are readily apparent, thus signifying the merging of cause and effect, and the immediate attainment of Buddhahood. And also, since a lotus blooms in muddy water, it is commonly recognized as a metaphor for the attainment of enlightenment while immersed in the realities of existence.

Later, at the pinnacle of His life, the Daishonin inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon as the supreme object of worship for all humanity. The Dai-Gohonzon is revered as the entity of the Mystic Law, which is the eternal fusion of Myoho Renge Kyo and the life of Nichiren Daishonin. Boldly inscribed in Chinese characters down the center of the Dai-Gohonzon is the phrase, "Nam Myoho Renge Kyo Nichiren." In the background, also in Chinese characters, are the names of Shakyamuni and Taho Buddha, many other Buddhas and bodhisattvas, the great teacher T'ien T'ai, Dengyo, those representing life conditions from the most evil to most compassionate, and others. Along the borders are the names of the protective deities, who vowed to protect those who propagate the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day. In the Daishonin's treatise entitled "The True Object of Worship," the Dai-Gohonzon is described as follows:

Now is when the Bodhisattvas of the Earth will appear in this country and establish the supreme object of worship on the earth which depicts Shakyamuni Buddha of the

essential teaching attending the true  
Buddha.(13)

(MWND, vol. one, p. 81)

Practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo to the Gohonzon, a spiritually endowed likeness of the Dai-Gohonzon, enshrined in their homes. This is done every morning and evening in a ceremony called Gongyo that involves the recitation of core sections of the second and sixteenth chapters of the Lotus Sutra, along with chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. Although streams of thought and the churning of subconscious repositories tend to obscure the Buddha nature when performing Gongyo, one may nevertheless, by focusing on the Gohonzon and wholeheartedly chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, fuse one's innate Buddhahood with the life condition of the original Buddha. In this way and at that moment, the followers of Nichiren Daishonin attain enlightenment in their present form and current existence, without prior lifetimes of practice.

The experience of enlightenment being referred to here, however, is not that profound realization attributed earlier to Shakyamuni outside the city of Gaya. Rather, with the help of a consistent practice based on a sincere understanding of the faith, one should expect to see a steady improvement in their life from embracing a force that offers 1) protection from undue harm, 2) an eventual solution to every form of suffering, 3) the gradual improvement of one's immediate environment, and 4) a

growing sense of compassion for the profound well-being of others. One should also consider the effects of this practice in the more profound context of improved conditions through the eternal cycle of birth, aging, sickness and death.

## **THE HIGH PRIEST**

To perpetuate the teachings after His passing, Nichiren Daishonin initiated a process by which the ability to fully understand and convey the spirit of the Dai-Gohonzon would be transferred by a series of High Priests. This transfer is referred to as the "Heritage of the Transmission of the Living Essence," and has explicit doctrinal roots in two of Nichiren Daishonin's writings.<sup>(14)</sup> The Second High Priest, Nikko Shonin, received the Living Essence directly from Nichiren Daishonin. Thereafter, the Living Essence has been similarly transferred in an exclusive, person-to-person manner to each successive High Priest. The Daishonin described the significance of this transfer as follows:

Each and every successive High Priest  
possesses the mind and heart of Nichiren.<sup>(15)</sup>  
(Seiten p. 379)

Although the High Priest is not viewed as equal to Nichiren Daishonin, who alone is revered as One with the Law, the High Priest is considered to be the single person who possesses the omniscient perspective of one who leads in complete accord with the compassionate

direction of the Founder. He also ensures that each Gohonzon issued to new believers is endowed with the "mind and heart of Nichiren" and that the "mind and heart" is filtered to the priesthood, who thereby propagate the teachings in the context of their individual capacities. It is for these reasons that the successive lineage of High Priests is considered one of the Three Treasures of Nichiren Shoshu.<sup>(16)</sup>

The current High Priest resides, like his predecessors, in Japan at the Head Temple Taisekiji. His busy schedule includes frequent lectures, attending briefings on administrative matters, and leading many significant ceremonies, including a special prayer service, called Ushitora Gongyo, performed during the traditional hours of enlightenment at 2:30 every morning. Ushitora Gongyo has been conducted in the middle of the night like this by each of the High Priests to honor the time when Nam Myoho Renge Kyo will be widely embraced throughout the world, and to offer appreciation to Nichiren Daishonin, the Dai-Gohonzon, and the successive lineage of High Priests, for making that eventuality possible.

## **THE HEAD TEMPLE**

The Head Temple Taisekiji is spread over scores of acres on a broad plane. Mount Fuji looms majestically nearby. A young believer, whose father began practicing Buddhism at the behest of Nichiren Daishonin, donated the land to the Second High Priest Nikko Shonin. In addition to being the residence of the High Priest, Taisekiji

is the headquarters for the priesthood and the place where the Dai-Gohonzon is enshrined. It is also where denominational relics, including a sizable collection of original writings by Nichiren Daishonin, have been carefully preserved.



When the Second High Priest Nikko Shonin moved to Taisekiji in 1289, he brought the Dai-Gohonzon, original writings, and remains of Nichiren Daishonin.

Within the temple grounds, amid patches of forest and tree-lined walkways many distinctive buildings stand together as fitting monuments to a religious faith with a venerable tradition. Yearly, hundreds of thousands of people make pilgrimages there to pray with the High Priest as He leads Ushitora Gongyo and to also perform Gongyo with Him during daylight hours before the Dai-Gohonzon in the main temple. A picture of the main temple, called the Hoando, appears on the cover of this booklet.

## **NICHIREN SHOSHU AND THE HOKKEKO**

The name, Nichiren Shoshu, means "orthodox Nichiren denomination." Of the factions associated with the Buddhism of the Daishonin, Nichiren Shoshu is the only one that believes in the integrity of the lineage of the successive High Priests, the doctrine of Nichiren Daishonin as the Original Buddha, and the Dai-Gohonzon as the supreme object of worship for all mankind.

In addition to the head temple at Taisekiji, Nichiren Shoshu also places considerable importance upon its local temples, each with a Chief Priest, one or more assistant priests, and a temple Gohonzon. Family members of priests frequently live at temples as well.

The priesthood are primarily responsible for the propagation of the faith in the area of the temple, performing the ceremony that enables new members to take faith, bestowing Gohonzon's for enshrinement in members' homes, delivering sermons consistent with the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and the High Priest, and performing other ceremonies, including weddings and memorial services. Typically, a person enters the priesthood at age twelve, but there have been priests who have entered earlier and much later in life.

The Hokkeko, which means "lotus group," is a general term that refers to all Nichiren Shoshu laity. The name was first used to identify those lay believers in Nichiren Daishonin's time called "Hokkeko-shu." During

severe persecutions near Mount Fuji in 1279, just before the Dai-Gohonzon was inscribed, the Hokkeko-shu showed exemplary faith by continuing to maintain their practice when threatened with death. Three of its strongest believers were beheaded when they refused to discard their faith upon demand by authorities. Also, from 1726 to 1879, Hokkeko believers near modern day Tokyo were routinely subjected to torture, exile and imprisonment for their beliefs. Today, there are some Nichiren Shoshu families in Japan who trace their lineage to the origins of the Hokkeko-shu.

What has held the priesthood and laity together over the centuries is a common desire to practice Buddhism correctly and a mutual respect for the role each other plays in this regard. After a priest learns the traditions of Nichiren Shoshu and is formally ordained, he essentially becomes an executive teacher of the faith, serving as a link for the personal distribution of the correct teachings from the High Priest. This commission also places the priest in a lifelong position of responsibility, where he must constantly develop his understanding, behavior, ability to communicate, and compassion for others in order to meet the higher standard expected of him.

The laity, on the other hand, emerge to a greater extent from society at large, with its inherent social inequalities and other secular influences. They represent Buddhism to the general populous. To do this properly it is imperative to maintain a lifeline with the correct teachings through a steady association with the priesthood. The

priests are considered our masters in faith, and we work with them to deeply absorb and earnestly propagate the teachings.

## **ENLIGHTENMENT, PRACTICE, AND THE HIGH SANCTUARY**

In Buddhism, a person's actions are ultimately judged on how effectively they advance enlightenment. We know this is the primary criteria in life because Shakyamuni revealed in the Lotus Sutra that his constant thought as a Buddha was to help all people attain enlightenment. We also know this because Nichiren Daishonin devoted His life to refuting erroneous religions and planting the seeds of Buddhahood for everyone in the Latter Day of the Law.

Accordingly, those who wish to begin practicing Buddhism are encouraged to establish a daily routine devoted to the advancement of enlightenment for oneself and others. This would include the recitation of the prescribed liturgy from the Lotus Sutra, chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, studying Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, and helping others break free from subordinate beliefs. At first this may be difficult but, as one becomes more familiar with Buddhist compassion and the pure joy of participating in it, the practices of morning and evening Gongyo, taking care of your altar at home, chanting with fellow members at area district meetings, attending temple ceremonies (if you live near a temple), making offerings to the priesthood, along with study and propagation become

natural activities readily performed to perpetuate Nichiren Daishonin's great mission.

The Daishonin described the outcome of a correct practice as follows:

The time will come when all people ... will enter on the path to Buddhahood, and the Mystic Law alone will flourish throughout the land. In that time, because all people chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo together, the wind will not beleaguer the branches or boughs, nor will the rain fall hard enough to break a clod ... Disasters will be driven from the land, and the people will be rid of misfortune. They will also learn the art of living long, fulfilling lives.

(MWND, vol. one, pp. 101-102)

He also instructed,

When the principles of government come to accord with Buddhism and the spirit of Buddhism pervades secular affairs, when both ruler and the governed alike embrace the three secret Laws of true Buddhism (17) ... then, when imperial decree is delivered and handed down, seek out a place of the finest scenery comparable to the pure land of Eagle Peak and there erect the high sanctuary. Simply wait for the proper time to come. This

is the actual high sanctuary of true Buddhism.

(Shinpen-gosho p.1595)

These passages vividly portray the ultimate goals of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, as well as its primary unfinished aspects. By formulating the invocation of Nam Myoho Renge Kyo and then inscribing the Dai-Gohonzon, the Daishonin established the means for everyone to attain enlightenment. By creating the Heritage of the Transfer for each successive High Priest, He also established a way to ensure that the original meaning of the Law would never be lost. It is well recognized within Nichiren Shoshu, however, that the establishment of True Buddhism will remain incomplete until that time when vast numbers of people wholeheartedly embrace the Dai-Gohonzon and the High Priest formally designates the "actual high sanctuary" as the place for its enshrinement. It is only in this way that the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin will be fully substantiated and the lasting peace and tranquility associated with enlightened life will become widely manifest.

## **CONCLUSION**

There are many religions and life philosophies embraced by people throughout the world. In the United States alone it is estimated that there are at least 2,300 distinct religious groups. From the perspective of a practice based on a correct interpretation of Nichiren

Daishonin's Buddhism, however, one cannot help but observe shortcomings in all other beliefs.

Since we are human, we are inclined to be impure, imperfect, and subject to bad influences. Basing our lives, therefore, on imperfect teachings essentially reinforces those traits. At the same time, to reach the shore of Buddhahood it is essential to embrace a teaching that is perfectly endowed. In this way we can tap into the absolute pure core of our being and transform ourselves, similar to the way a white lotus flower blooms in a muddy pond.

Numerous religions, of course, contend that their path is the only true path to happiness and, because of this, they are criticized for being closed minded and intolerant. Generally, such criticisms are deserved because the essential tenets of these faiths are inconsistent with the fundamental Law of the universe and the people who immerse themselves in them can not transcend the mortal bounds of a highly rigid mindset.

Yet, at the same time, it would be quite troubling to deny the possibility of one religion, as the only true religion, just because of the prevalence of false alternatives with steadfast followers. If we were to think this way wouldn't it preclude any hope for the salvation of mankind? For without a belief that truly mirrors the absolute, wouldn't we all be condemned to lives based on fundamental delusion?

No explanation, though, should be expected to entirely convey the profound nature of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism. A brief summary of its rituals and teachings, as presented here, is helpful in conceptualizing what it is about, but to attain enlightenment one must go beyond mere understanding by sincerely practicing and embracing the faith. If you are not already practicing, it is hoped that you will consider taking the first step by contacting someone who is. In those areas with a temple, the priests or temple staff can refer you to a temple member who lives nearby, so that you can get started.

As those who have practiced for a while can attest, if you begin and persevere, it will be the most liberating decision of your life.

\* \* \*

## Endnotes:

1) According to the Upanishad, an ancient Brahman text,

The Brahman is the same as the ether that is around us, and the ether that is around us is the same as the ether that is within us. And the ether within is the ether within the heart. That ether in the heart is omnipresent and unchanging. He who knows this obtains omnipresent and unchangeable happiness. (Kh. Upanishad, III, 12, 7-9); "Preface to the Sacred Books of the East," by F. Max Muller (1879)

See also, [The Origins of Buddhism: Circumstances before the Establishment of Buddhism](#)

2) Contrary to the sequential explanation of cause and effect taught in Brahmanism, Shakyamuni taught that cause and effect could loop around. For example, effects experienced in one's current existence could have been the result of causes made in past, present, or future lifetimes.

3) According to Chapter 11 of The Threefold Lotus Sutra, Weatherhill, p. 205, Shakyamuni taught:

I, on account of the Buddha-way, in innumerable lands from the beginning till now have widely preached many sutra; but amongst them all this sutra is the chief, and if anyone is

able to keep it, then he keeps the Buddha's body.

In Chapter 14, p. 232, he also declared,

This Law-Flower Sutra is the foremost teaching of the tathagatas [Buddhas] and the most profound of all discourses . . . This Law-Flower Sutra is the mysterious treasury of the Buddha-tathagatas, which is supreme above all sutras. For long has it been guarded and not prematurely declared; today for the first time I proclaim it to you all.

4) The Threefold Lotus Sutra, Weatherhill, Chapter 15, p. 245.

5) The principle of transforming earthly desires into enlightenment is found in the Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue, also called the Fugen Sutra. (The Threefold Lotus Sutra, Weatherhill, pp. 347 - 348). Since the Fugen Sutra references the Lotus Sutra, it is considered to be an epilogue for the Lotus Sutra, or "closing sutra." (Ibid, preface, p. x)

6) The account in Chapter 12 of the Lotus Sutra (The Threefold Lotus Sutra, Weatherhill, p. 212) about the Dragon King's daughter, who was only eight years old and attained enlightenment "in a moment of time," is often cited as the primary source for the principle of the attainment of enlightenment, regardless of who you are.

7) Because Mahayana Buddhism became prominent after Hinayana and the earliest Hinayana sutras are older than the Mahayana sutras, many scholars have suggested that the Hinayana sutras, which stress personal enlightenment, are the only accurate reflection of what Shakyamuni taught, and that Mahayana sutras, which advocate a practice for others as well as oneself, are mere extrapolations composed well after Shakyamuni died. This interpretation is highly unlikely, however, when you consider that Shakyamuni taught Buddhism for 50 years after he attained enlightenment, thus basing most of his life on the salvation of others while overcoming considerable hardships to do so.

8) T'ien T'ai's conclusions were founded upon Kumarjiva's Chinese version of the Lotus Sutra, translated in 406 A.D. Although there was an earlier Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra, dated 286 A.D., there is no evidence that the earlier version was based on an older Sanskrit or Pali text. Because the versions of the Lotus Sutra used as the source for both translations have been lost, it is not known which translation was based on the oldest manuscript or, for that matter, when the Lotus Sutra was first put into writing and what language was originally used. (The Threefold Lotus Sutra, Weatherhill, Introduction, p. xiv; See also The Essential Lotus, Burton Watson, p.xxxii.)

9) Nichiren Daishonin's name at birth was Zennichi-maro. At sixteen, when he was ordained a Tendai priest at Seicho-ji Temple, he took the name Zesho-bo Rencho. In 1253 he renamed himself Nichiren, which means sun lotus. Daishonin is an honorific name. "Dai" means great or supreme. "Shonin"

signifies sage. As to the name Nichiren, the Daishonin stated, "Giving myself the name Nichiren signifies that I attained enlightenment by myself." (MWND, vol. one, p. 236) See also, [The Life of Nichiren Daishonin](#).

10) a) Buddhist scriptures differ as to the length of time between Shakyamuni's death and the beginning of the Latter Day. The Sutra of the Three Kinds of Mahayana Practice Based on Repentance asserts that the intermediate time period is 1000 years. The Sutra of the Great Assembly sets the length at 2000 years. The Hike Sutra gauges the length at 1500 years. A Commentary on Nagarjuna's Chu Ron states that the period is 2000 years. The Buddhist tradition of China and Japan has generally adopted the latter view. (A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts, p. 462)

b) Chapter 14 of The Threefold Lotus Sutra, pp. 226, 228, 230, contains numerous references to the demise of Shakyamuni's teachings.

c) According to The Threefold Lotus Sutra, p. 300:

After the Tathagata [Buddha] is extinct such a one, knowing this sutra that the Buddha has taught, together with its reasoning and process, shall expound it according to its true meaning. Just as the light of the sun and moon can dispel the darkness, so this man, working in the world, can disperse the gloom of the living and cause numberless bodhisattvas finally to

abide in the One-vehicle. Therefore he who has wisdom, hearing the benefits of this merit, after I am extinct, should receive and keep this sutra. This man shall in the Way of the Buddha be fixed and have no doubts.

11).The Threefold Lotus Sutra, Weatherhill, Chapter 13, pp. 218-19.

12) Other doctrinal sources reflecting Nichiren Daishonin's recognition of himself as the Original Buddha include, but are not limited, to the following passages:

I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink. Believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. The will of the Buddha is the Lotus Sutra, but the spirit of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

(Gosho, p. 685; MWND-1, p. 120)

Nichiren of the eternally living in the three existences is the original True Buddha of the stage of the immediate recognition of the truth, who leads all mankind to the unsurpassed Way of Buddhahood. (Shinpen p. 1696)

The Daimoku, Lord Shakyamni, Taho Buddha ... and all other Buddhas and deities inscribed in the Gohonzon are inherent in the Life of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin.

(Shinyo-20, p. 11)

My true identity is the Buddha of Intrinsic Perfect Wisdom. My provisional identity is the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Jogyo - Nichiren the present Great Master of the Essential teaching. (Gosho, p. 1685)

13) This passage from the "True Object of Worship" was originally written four years before Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon. In October 1270, twelve days before He inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon, the Daishonin wrote (MWND vol. one, p. 239):

It is twenty-seven years since I first proclaimed the true teachings ... the Buddha fulfilled the purpose of his advent in a little over forty years; T'ien t'ai took about thirty years, and Dengyo, some twenty years ... For me it took twenty seven years.

Also, on the Dai-Gohonzon it is written,

Two thousand two hundred and thirty years after the Buddha's death, the incomparable object of worship for the world - seal of Nichiren.

Reference to the Dai-Gohonzon was also made in 1332 by the Second High Priest Nikko Shonin, at the time of the succession of lineage to the Third High Priest:

I, Nikko, heir to the Dai-Gohonzon inscribed in 1279, do hereby confer this Dai-Gohonzon upon Nichimoku Shonin.

(Gosho, p. 1883)

There may have been other writings confirming the existence of the Dai-Gohonzon, but many of Nichiren Daishonin's original writings have been lost or destroyed.

14) Transfer Documents (Gosho Zenshu, p. 1675) (The originals of these documents were misappropriated by a deeply confused priest and never recovered. Their preexistence and the theft, however, are well documented.):

a) Document Transferring the Law which Nichiren Propagated throughout His Life:

I transfer this Law, which I, Nichiren, have propagated throughout my life to Byakuren Ajari Nikko. He is to be the High Priest for the propagation of True Buddhism. When the sovereign takes faith in and preserves this Law, the High Sanctuary of Honmonji Temple must be built at Mount Fuji. You must wait for the time to come. This is what I call the actual Law of precept. Above all, my disciples and believers must observe this document. Nichiren.  
(signature) The ninth month of the fifth year of Koan.

b) Mt. Minobu Transfer Document:

I transfer Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings of fifty years to Byakuren Ajari Nikko. He is to be Head Priest of Minobu-san Kuonji Temple. Those priests and lay believers who disregard this are slanderers of the Law. The thirteenth day of the tenth month of the fifth year of Koan. At Ikegami Musashi Province Nichiren (signature)

15) This statement about the role of the High Priest was issued verbally by Nichiren Daishonin and memorialized in writing by the Second High Priest, Nikko Shonin.

16) The Three Treasures in Nichiren Shoshu are the Buddha, the Law and the Priesthood. The Buddha is Nichiren Daishonin, the Law is the Dai-Gohonzon and the Priesthood is the successive lineage of High Priests.

17) The "three secret Laws of True Buddhism" (also referred to as the Three Great Secret Laws) are the object of worship, the invocation of Nam Myoho Renge Kyo and the actual high sanctuary, which is the place where the Dai-Gohonzon will be enshrined when kosen-rufu is achieved. "Kosen-rufu" refers to the time when the Dai-Gohonzon is widely revered throughout the world as the supreme object of worship and, as a result, peace and tranquility prevail.

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