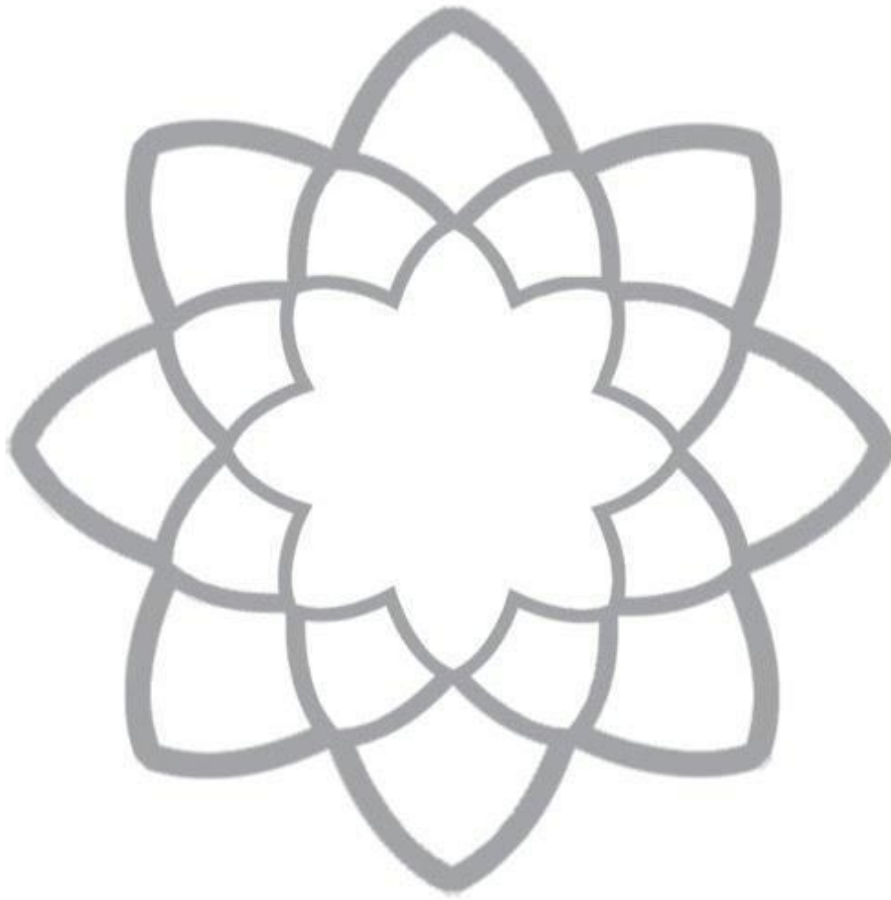


# Grade 1

**SGI Netherlands  
Grade 1 Study Course**



# Contents

<b>Message from Hideki Iwami</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>

## Notes

### Section A – The life of Nichiren Daishonin

#### STUDY MATERIAL PART 1

The life of Nichiren Daishonin	7
--------------------------------	---

### Section B – Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime

#### STUDY MATERIAL PART 2

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo	13
---------------------	----

#### STUDY MATERIAL PART 3

Nichiren Daishonin's Goshō, 'On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime'	15
--	----

#### STUDY MATERIAL PART 4

SGI President Ikeda's lecture on 'On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime'	18
---	----

### Section C – Kosen-rufu

#### STUDY MATERIAL PART 5

'Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land' and kosen-rufu	24
--	----

### Section D – The history of the Soka Gakkai

#### STUDY MATERIAL PART 6

The history of the Soka Gakkai	27
--------------------------------	----

#### STUDY MATERIAL PART 7

The Soka Gakkai-Nichiren Shoshu split	39
---------------------------------------	----

# Welcome to the Grade 1 study course!

**Message from  
SGI Netherlands General Director,  
Hideki Iwami**

**T**hank you for wanting to deepen your understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism through this study course. I am sure that all your efforts will bring deeper awareness of the empowering philosophy of Buddhism as well as greater joy through your Buddhist practice.

In a recent study lecture, SGI President Ikeda made a really important point about study. He wrote, 'I am certain that your enthusiasm in the noble pursuit of Buddhist study will spread to those around you and contribute to steadily transforming the spiritual foundation of society.' (*SGI Newsletter* No. 10166)

This quotation shows the important effect of being involved in the study movement, whether it's the local courses going through and discussing this Grade 1 material, the monthly study lecture or any personal study you may do on your own. When we study with growing enthusiasm, Sensei tells us, the effect of this will even change the foundation of society. The philosophy of respect for the dignity of life will spread through each of us to make a difference for everyone around us in the wider world.

I am sure you will enjoy being involved in this course, and that you will see how the ideas of Nichiren Buddhism can make a difference not only in your own life, but also the world around you.

Warm wishes,

Hideki Iwami



**Introduction by  
SGI  
Netherlands  
Study  
Department**

**T**he Grade 1 study course builds on the foundation of the 'Basics of Buddhism' study course at district level. If you have not had the opportunity to take part in Basics study you might find it helpful for this course to look at the online resources – particularly for Topic 2 (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo), Topic 7 (Human revolution/ Attaining Buddhahood), Topic 8 (Kosen-rufu) and Topic 12 (The History and Lineage of Buddhism).

Grade 1 involves the same process as the Basics course of both studying together with others at local meetings and your own independent study. Studying together with others, supported by a local leader, is important, as we are able to expand our understanding of Buddhist principles beyond our own limited perspective and we also remember that a key purpose of study is not the mere accumulation of knowledge but of deepening our faith and sharing the Law with others.

The course will involve local study meetings through which you will explore the study material and discuss

key points together. Please aim to commit to attending all these meetings.

This Grade 1 course has four sections through which you will focus on 4 key topics:

Section A: The life of Nichiren Daishonin

Section B: Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime

Section C: Kosen-rufu

Section D: The history of the Soka Gakkai

By studying this course together with other members in your local area you will deepen your understanding of the life of Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, and how this is relevant to your own life today.

The study material for this Section A is an extract from the Soka Gakkai Study Department study text 'The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism for the New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu'. (Other extracts from this text are used for part of sections B, C and D study material.)

In Section B you will explore in depth Nichiren Daishonin's key teaching that all ordinary people can awaken to and reveal their innate Buddha nature just as they are, in this lifetime, and free themselves from the sufferings of birth and death. Through this you will deepen your conviction in your own Buddhahood and the process of human revolution and also how to explain this principle to others. The study materials for this topic include Nichiren Daishonin's own writing





(Gosho) from 1255, 'On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime' and a lecture on this Gosho by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda.

In Section C you will focus on studying about kosen-rufu and how the aim of Buddhism is 'to share and spread the correct teaching that embodies the Buddha's enlightenment and guide all people towards attaining the life-state of Buddhahood and realise peace and prosperity for all humanity'. (SGI *Newsletter* No. 9379) In this way you will deepen your understanding of the profound significance of the activities we carry out as SGI members in our districts and in society.

In Section D you will learn about the history of the Soka Gakkai, the organisation that shares the heart and spirit of Nichiren Daishonin and its three founding presidents, our eternal example of selfless dedication to propagation of the Law.

You will also study about the 'priesthood issue' and our spiritual independence. Another study material provided for this section is an online resource from the Soka Gakkai International Office of Public Information.

Just as for Section A, we hope that rather than studying this just as history you will explore its profound relevance for your life and practice of Buddhism today.

Studying for an exam helps us to challenge ourselves in a deeper way than we would otherwise be likely to. However, the Grade 1 exam is not complicated and is designed to consolidate and celebrate your learning. Most questions are multiple choice with only a few requiring a short, written answer. Here are some examples:

### Example 1

At the age of 12, why did Nichiren Daishonin make a vow to be the wisest person in Japan?

(Select one correct answer)

- It was a requirement of life in the monastery.
- So that he could lead his parents and all people to genuine happiness.
- So that he could one day become a chief priest at a temple.

### Example 2

'Therefore, when you chant *myoho* and recite *renge*, you must summon up deep faith that...'

(Complete this quotation from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*)

We very much hope that you will enjoy studying this course, taking the exam and sharing your experience with others!

Study Department



# The life of Nichiren Daishonin

## Study material part 1

### From the SGI Study department series 'The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism for the New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu' (SGI Newsletter No. 9348)

**N**ichiren Daishonin (1222-82) dedicated his life to propagating the Mystic Law – Nam-myoho-renge-kyo – motivated by an unwavering commitment and compassion to eradicate suffering and enable all people to reveal their innate Buddhahood. Hardship and persecution dogged him throughout his life as he sought to address and put an end to the evils obstructing people's happiness.

#### Early years

The Daishonin was born on 16 February 1222, in the coastal hamlet of Kataumi in Tojo Village of Nagasa District in Awa Province (part of present-day Kamogawa City in Chiba Prefecture). He was the son of commoners, his family earning its livelihood from fishing.

At the age<sup>1</sup> of 12, he began his schooling at a nearby temple called Seicho-ji. During this period, he made a vow to become the wisest person in Japan (see 'The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei', WND-1, p. 175). He sought to gain the wisdom of the Buddhist teachings for overcoming the fundamental sufferings of life and death, and thereby lead his parents and all people to genuine happiness.

At the age of 16, in pursuit of a deeper understanding of the Buddhist teachings, he formally entered the priesthood at Seicho-ji, receiving instruction from

Dozen-bo, a senior priest there. It was shortly thereafter, the Daishonin writes, that he attained 'a jewel of wisdom as bright as the morning star'. ('The Tripitaka Master Shan-wu-wei', WND-1, p. 176) This can be interpreted to mean wisdom regarding the Mystic Law that is the essence of Buddhism.

The Daishonin then travelled to Kamakura, Kyoto, Nara, and other centres of Buddhist learning, carefully studying the sutras and commentaries housed at leading temples such as Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, the headquarters of the Tendai school, and familiarising himself with the core doctrines of each school. He confirmed that the Lotus Sutra is the foremost among all the Buddhist sutras and that the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to which he had awakened is the essence of the sutra and provides the means for freeing all people from suffering on the most fundamental level. He also awoke to his mission to spread Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the teaching for people in the Latter Day of the Law<sup>2</sup> to attain enlightenment.

#### The declaration of the establishment of his teaching

Through his studies at leading Buddhist centres, the Daishonin confirmed his mission to spread the Mystic Law – Nam-myoho-renge-kyo – and the means by which to do so. He embarked on his struggle knowing that he would inevitably encounter great opposition and persecution.

On 28 April 1253, around noon at Seicho-ji temple, he refuted the Nembutsu and other Buddhist teachings of his day as erroneous and proclaimed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to be the sole correct Buddhist teaching for leading all people in the Latter Day of the Law to enlightenment. This is known as the

<sup>1</sup> All ages in this text are given according to traditional East Asian age reckoning, in which the first year of life is counted as one instead of zero, so that a person is one year old in their first year, two years old in their second year, and so on.

<sup>2</sup> The Latter Day of the Law refers to the age when the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha lose their power to lead people to enlightenment. It was generally regarded to mean the period two thousand years after the Buddha's passing. In Japan, it was believed that this age began in the year 1052.

declaration of the establishment of his teaching. He was 32 years old. From around this time, he adopted the name Nichiren (literally, Sun Lotus).

The Daishonin's denunciation of the Nembutsu doctrines on the occasion of declaring his teaching enraged Tojo Kagenobu, who was the local steward (an official of the Kamakura government who had the powers of law enforcement and tax collection) and an ardent Nembutsu believer. The latter planned an armed attack on the Daishonin, but the Daishonin narrowly managed to escape beforehand.

The Daishonin then made his way to Kamakura, the seat of the military government. There, he took up residence in a small dwelling in Nagoe (at a site that later came to be known as Matsubagayatsu) and embarked in earnest on propagating his teaching. While refuting the error of the Nembutsu and Zen teachings, which had gained wide influence among the people of Kamakura, the Daishonin spread the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. It was during this early period of propagation that such well-known disciples as Toki Jonin, Shijo Kingo (Shijo Yorimoto) and Ikegami Munenaka converted to his teaching.

### **Submitting the treatise 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land' and encountering persecution**

In the period when the Daishonin began his propagation efforts in Kamakura, Japan had been experiencing a series of natural disasters and calamities, including extreme weather, severe earthquakes, famine, fires and epidemics. In particular, the devastating earthquake of the Shoka era, which struck the Kamakura region in August 1257,



CLARE ROLLINSON

destroyed many homes and important buildings in Kamakura.

This disaster prompted the Daishonin to write the treatise 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land' (see WND-1, pp. 6-26), to clarify the fundamental cause of people's suffering and set forth the means by which people could eradicate such suffering. On 16 July 1260, he submitted this treatise to Hojo Tokiyori, the retired regent of the Kamakura military government, who was still effectively the country's most powerful leader. It was the first time that the Daishonin remonstrated with the authorities. (This is known as his first remonstrance with the government authorities.)

In this treatise, he declared that the cause of the successive calamities lay with people's slander of the correct teaching of Buddhism and their reliance on erroneous doctrines. The most serious root cause, he asserted, was the Nembutsu teaching popularised in Japan by the priest Honen (1133-1212).

The Daishonin urged people to discontinue their reliance on such erroneous teachings and embrace faith in the correct teaching of Buddhism without delay, for this would ensure the realisation of a peaceful and prosperous land.

Continued reliance on erroneous teachings, he warned, would inevitably result in the country encountering internal strife and foreign invasion – the two calamities of the 'three calamities and seven disasters'<sup>3</sup> yet to occur.

However, the ruling authorities ignored the Daishonin's sincere remonstrance and, with their tacit approval, Nembutsu followers began plotting to persecute the Daishonin.

One evening shortly after the Daishonin submitted his treatise 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land', a group of Nembutsu believers stormed his dwelling in an attempt to take his life. (This is called the Matsubagayatsu Persecution.) However, the Daishonin escaped unharmed. After this incident, he left Kamakura for a short period.

On 12 May 1261, the following year, having returned to Kamakura some time earlier, the Daishonin

<sup>3</sup> The 'three calamities and seven disasters' are described in various sutras, and differ slightly depending on the source. The three calamities include high grain prices or inflation (especially that caused by famine), warfare and pestilence. The seven disasters include natural disasters such as extraordinary changes of the stars and planets and unseasonable storms.



was arrested by the authorities and sentenced to exile in Ito of Izu Province. (This is called the Izu Exile.) After being pardoned from exile in February 1263, the Daishonin made his way back to Kamakura.

In 1264, he returned to his home province of Awa to visit his ailing mother. On November 11 of that year, the Daishonin and a group of his followers were on their way to the residence of another follower named Kudo in Amatsu (also in Awa Province). At a place called Matsubara in Tojo Village, they were ambushed by a band of armed men under the command of the local steward, Tojo Kagenobu. In the attack, the Daishonin sustained an injury to his forehead and a broken left hand. One of his followers was killed at the site. (This is called the Komatsubara Persecution.)

### **The Tatsunokuchi Persecution and ‘casting off the transient and revealing the true’**

In 1268, an official letter arrived in Kamakura from the Mongol empire demanding that Japan become one of its tributaries and threatening military attack should the demand be rejected. With this development, the danger of the calamity of foreign invasion befalling the nation became very real.

This spurred the Daishonin to write eleven letters of remonstrance to top government officials, including the regent Hojo Tokimune, and the heads of major Buddhist temples in Kamakura. In the letters, he stated that the impending danger of an invasion was just as he had predicted in his treatise ‘On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land’, and he expressed the hope that the priests of the various Buddhist schools would meet with him in an official public debate.

Neither the government leaders nor the religious establishment heeded the Daishonin’s appeal. Rather, viewing the Daishonin’s community of believers as a threat to the existing power structure, the government began to take repressive measures against it.

Around this time, True Word priests were enjoying growing influence, the government having charged them with the mission of conducting prayers for the defeat of Mongol forces. Ryokan (Ninsho) of Gokuraku-ji temple in Kamakura, a priest of the True Word Precepts school, was also becoming more influential through his connections with powerful government figures.

The Daishonin fearlessly began to refute the errors of the established Buddhist schools that were exerting a negative influence on the people and society as a whole.

In the summer of 1271, in response to a prolonged drought, the government ordered Ryokan to pray for rain. Learning of this, the Daishonin made a proposal to Ryokan: If Ryokan should succeed in producing rain within seven days, the Daishonin would become his disciple; but if he failed to do so, then Ryokan should place his faith in the Lotus Sutra.

When his prayers failed to produce any rain after seven days had passed, Ryokan asked for a seven-day extension. Again no rain fell, but fierce gales arose instead. Ryokan had clearly lost the challenge.

Rather than honestly acknowledge defeat, however, Ryokan grew even more hostile towards the Daishonin. He contrived to bring accusations against the Daishonin by filing a complaint with the government in the name of a Nembutsu priest who had close ties with him. He also used his influence with top government officials as well as

### **Notes**

their wives to have the Daishonin persecuted by the authorities.

Although Ryokan was widely respected among the populace as a devout and virtuous priest, he enjoyed the trappings of power and privilege and colluded with government officials towards self-serving ends.

On 10 September of the same year (1271), the Daishonin was summoned by the government and interrogated by Hei no Saemon-no-jo Yoritsuna (also known as Taira no Yoritsuna), the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs (the chief being the regent himself). The Daishonin admonished him and emphasised the proper attitude for the nation’s rulers based on the correct teaching of Buddhism.

Two days later, on 12 September, Hei no Saemon-no-jo, leading a group of armed soldiers, conducted a raid on the Daishonin’s dwelling and arrested him, treating him as if he were a traitor. On that occasion, the Daishonin strongly remonstrated with Hei no Saemon-no-jo, warning that if he toppled him, ‘the pillar of Japan’, the calamities of internal strife and foreign invasion would descend on

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the land. (The events on 10 and 12 September marked his second remonstrance with the government authorities.)

Late that night, the Daishonin was suddenly taken by armed soldiers to the beach at Tatsunokuchi, on the outskirts of Kamakura. This was at the directive of Hei no Saemon-no-jo and others who conspired to have the Daishonin secretly beheaded there. Just as the executioner raised his sword to strike, however, a brilliant orb of light burst forth from the direction of the nearby island of Enoshima, shooting northwest across the sky. The soldiers were terrified, and the attempt to kill the Daishonin had to be abandoned. (This is called the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.)

This persecution had extremely important significance for the Daishonin. In triumphing over the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, he cast off his transient status as an ordinary, unenlightened person burdened with karma and suffering and, while remaining an ordinary human being, revealed his original, true identity as a Buddha possessing infinite wisdom and compassion (the

Buddha of beginningless time or eternal Buddha). This is called 'casting off the transient and revealing the true'.

Thereafter, the Daishonin's behaviour was that of the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, and he went on to inscribe the Gohonzon for all people to revere and embrace as the fundamental object of devotion.

### The Sado exile

While the government was deliberating on his fate following the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, the Daishonin was detained for about a month at the residence of Homma Shigetsura (the deputy constable of Sado) in Echi, Sagami Province (part of present-day Atsugi City, Kanagawa Prefecture). During this period, the Daishonin's followers in Kamakura were subjected to many forms of persecution, including being unjustly accused of arson, murder and other crimes.

Eventually, the Daishonin was sentenced to exile on Sado Island (part of present-day Niigata Prefecture). He departed from Echi on 10 October, arriving at the graveyard of Tsukahara on Sado on 1 November. The dwelling he was assigned there was a small, dilapidated shrine called the Sammai-do, which had been used for funerary rites. The conditions the Daishonin faced were truly harsh. It was bitterly cold on Sado, and he lacked sufficient food and warm clothing. In addition, he was surrounded by hostile Nembutsu followers who sought to take his life.

The Daishonin's followers in Kamakura also continued to suffer persecution. Some were even imprisoned, banished, or had their lands confiscated. The majority of his remaining followers began to have doubts and discarded their faith out of fear and a desire for self-preservation.

On 16 and 17 January the following year, 1272, several hundred Buddhist priests from Sado and nearby provinces on the mainland gathered at Tsukahara with the intent to kill the Daishonin. They were stopped by Homma Shigetsura, who proposed that they engage the Daishonin in a religious debate instead. In the debate that ensued, the Daishonin thoroughly refuted the erroneous teachings of the various Buddhist schools of his day. (This is known as the Tsukahara Debate.)

In February, a faction of the ruling Hojo clan rose up in rebellion, and fighting broke out in Kamakura and Kyoto, the seat of the military government and imperial capital, respectively. (This is known as the February Disturbance or the Hojo Tokisuke Rebellion.) The Daishonin's prediction of internal strife had come true just 150 days after declaring it in his remonstrance with Hei no Saemon-no-jo at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution.

In early summer of that year, the Daishonin was transferred from Tsukahara to Ichinosawa, also on Sado, but his life continued to be threatened by angry Nembutsu followers.

Nikko Shonin, who later became the Daishonin's successor, remained at his side throughout his Sado exile, faithfully following and serving him and sharing his sufferings. The Daishonin also steadily gained followers while on Sado Island, including Abutsu-bo and his wife, the lay nun Sennichi.

The Daishonin composed many important works during his exile on Sado. Of special significance are 'The Opening of the Eyes' and 'The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind'.

'The Opening of the Eyes', written in February 1272, explains that the Daishonin is the votary

of the Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law, who is practising in exact accord with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Ultimately, it reveals his identity as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law endowed with the three virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent to lead all people in the latter age to enlightenment. ('The Opening of the Eyes' is referred to as 'the writing clarifying the object of devotion in terms of the Person'.)

'The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind', written in April 1273, presents the object of devotion of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo to be embraced by all people in the Latter Day of the Law in order to attain Buddhahood. (It is referred to as 'the writing clarifying the object of devotion in terms of the Law'.)

In February 1274, the Daishonin was pardoned, and in March, he departed from Sado and returned to Kamakura.

Meeting Hei no Saemon-no-jo in April, the Daishonin strongly remonstrated with him, denouncing the government's actions in ordering priests to pray for the defeat of the Mongols based on the True Word and other erroneous Buddhist teachings. Further, responding to a direct question from Hei no Saemon-no-jo, he predicted that the Mongol invasion would most certainly take place before the year's end. (This marked his third remonstrance with the government authorities.)

Just as the Daishonin predicted, a large Mongol fleet attacked Kyushu, the southernmost of Japan's four main islands, in October 1274. (This is referred to as the first Mongol invasion.)

With this event, the two predictions he had made in 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land' – those

of internal strife and foreign invasion – had come true.

This was the third time that the Daishonin had directly remonstrated with the government authorities and predicted that disasters would befall the country. Affirming that his predictions had been fulfilled, the Daishonin wrote, 'Three times now I have gained distinction by having such knowledge.' ('The Selection of the Time', WND-1, p. 579).



### Taking up residence at Mount Minobu

When the government rejected his final remonstrance, the Daishonin decided to leave Kamakura and take up residence in Hakii Village on the slopes of Mount Minobu in Kai Province (present-day Yamanashi Prefecture). The local steward was Hakii Sanenaga, who had become a follower of the Daishonin through the propagation efforts of Nikko Shonin.

The Daishonin moved to Mount Minobu in May 1274. His change of residence, however, was by no means a retreat from the world. He composed many of his major works there, including 'The Selection of the Time' and 'On Repaying Debts of Gratitude'. In these writings, he elucidated numerous important teachings – in particular, the Three Great Secret Laws (the object of devotion of the essential teaching, the sanctuary of the essential teaching, and the daimoku of the essential teaching). Through lectures on the Lotus Sutra, he devoted himself to fostering disciples who would carry out kosen-rufu in the future. During this period, he also wrote many letters to his lay followers throughout the country, patiently instructing and encouraging them so they could persevere with strong faith, win in life, and attain the state of Buddhahood.

### The Atsuhara Persecution and the purpose of the Daishonin's appearance in this world

After the Daishonin moved to Mount Minobu, Nikko Shonin actively led propagation efforts in the Fuji District of Suruga Province (present-day central Shizuoka Prefecture), successfully convincing many Tendai priests and followers to abandon their old religious affiliations and begin practising the Daishonin's teaching. This prompted harassment and persecution by local Tendai temples, and threats were directed at those who had embraced the Daishonin's teaching.

On 21 September 1279, twenty farmers who were followers of the Daishonin in Atsuhara, a village in Suruga Province, were arrested on trumped-up charges and taken to Kamakura. At the residence of Hei no Saemon-no-jo,

**The four major persecutions endured by Nichiren Daishonin during the course of his life**

**1260:** The Matsubagayatsu Persecution

**1261-1263:** The Izu Exile

**1264:** The Komatsubara Persecution

**1271-1274:** The Tatsunokuchi Persecution and Sado Exile

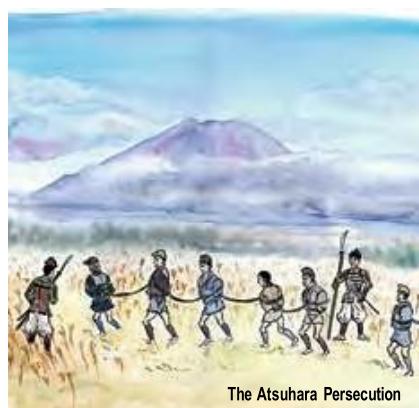
they were subjected to harsh interrogation equivalent to torture. Though they were pressed to abandon their faith in the Lotus Sutra, they all remained true to their beliefs. Three of the twenty followers arrested – the brothers Jinshiro, Yagoro and Yarokuro – were ultimately executed, while the remaining seventeen were banished from their places of residence. (This series of events is known as the Atsuhara Persecution.)

The example of these farmer followers persevering in faith without begrudging their lives convinced the Daishonin that humble, ordinary people without any position in society had developed sufficiently strong faith to withstand great persecutions.

In 'On Persecutions Befalling the Sage', dated 1 October 1279, in the twenty-seventh year after proclaiming his teaching, he refers to the purpose of his appearance in this world. (cf. WND-1, p. 996) While still little more than a child, the Daishonin had vowed to become a person of wisdom who understood the essence of Buddhism and to free all people from suffering at the most fundamental level. The fulfilment of that vow was his life's guiding purpose. Expounding the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the fundamental Law for the

enlightenment of all people, and revealing the Three Great Secret Laws – that is, the object of devotion of the essential teaching, the sanctuary of the essential teaching, and the daimoku of the essential teaching – he established the foundation for kosen-rufu that would endure for all time.

During the Atsuhara Persecution, ordinary people who embraced faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that encompasses the Three Great Secret Laws, dedicated themselves to kosen-rufu without begrudging their lives. Their appearance demonstrated that the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin was a teaching that would be championed by ordinary people, a teaching for the enlightenment of all humanity.



The Daishonin thus fulfilled the purpose of his appearance in this world. What came to be called the Gohonzon of the second year of the Koan era (1279) was also inscribed during this period.

At the time of the Atsuhara Persecution, the Daishonin's followers strove in faith with the united spirit of 'many in body, one in mind'. His youthful disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu, steward of a village neighbouring Atsuhara, worked tirelessly to protect his fellow believers.

**The Daishonin's death and Nikko Shonin's succession**

On 8 September 1282, the Daishonin, who was in declining health, left Minobu, where he had resided for nine years. He departed with the stated intent of visiting the therapeutic hot springs in Hitachi Province (part of present-day Ibaraki and Fukushima prefectures) at the recommendation of his disciples. When he arrived at the residence of his follower Ikegami Munenaka (the elder of the Ikegami brothers) in Ikegami in Musashi Province (present-day Ota Ward, Tokyo), he began to make arrangements for after his death.

On 25 September, in spite of being gravely ill, he is said to have given a lecture to his followers on his treatise 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land'.

The Daishonin passed away at Ikegami Munenaka's residence on 13 October 1282, at the age of 61, bringing to a close his noble life as the votary of the Lotus Sutra.

After the Daishonin's death, Nikko Shonin carried on his mentor's fearless spirit and actions for kosen-rufu. Based on his awareness as the Daishonin's successor, Nikko Shonin continued to speak out against slander of the Law and to remonstrate with the government authorities. He treasured every one of the Daishonin's writings, referring to them by the honorific name Goshō ('honourable writings'), and encouraged all disciples to read and study them as the sacred scripture for the Latter Day of the Law. He also fostered many outstanding disciples who exerted themselves in Buddhist practice and study. •



# Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

## Study material part 2

**From the SGI Study department series 'The Basics of Nichiren Buddhism for the New Era of Worldwide Kosen-rufu' (SGI Newsletter No. 9363)**

**N**am-myoho-renge-kyo is the essence of Buddhism and the fundamental Law perceived by Nichiren Daishonin for resolving the suffering of all humanity. Here, we will examine a few of the important aspects of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

### The fundamental Law that pervades the universe and life

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental Law that pervades the entire universe and all life.

Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, viewed the sufferings of all people as his own and searched for a way to resolve those sufferings. In the process, he awakened to the truth that the eternal, all-pervading, fundamental Law of the universe and life existed within his own being. This realisation led to his being known as the Buddha, or 'Awakened One'. Then, with wisdom and compassion, he expounded numerous teachings, which later were compiled as Buddhist sutras. Among them, the Lotus Sutra teaches the true essence of the Buddha's enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin identified this Law to which Shakyamuni awakened – the Law that can resolve human suffering on a fundamental level and open the way to genuine happiness – as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

### The essential Law for attaining Buddhahood

Buddhas are those who have embodied the Law in their own lives, overcome all suffering, and established an unshakeable inner state of absolute happiness.

The Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essential principle, or means, for attaining Buddhahood.



### The eternal Law inherent in all people's lives

Buddhas are awakened to the truth that the Law exists not only within their own lives, but also within the lives of all people. They realise that this all-pervasive Law transcends the bounds of life and death and can never be lost or destroyed.

The Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is universal, inherent in all people; it is also eternal, persisting throughout the three existences of past, present and future.

### The profound meaning reflected in the name, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

The profound meaning of the fundamental Law is reflected in its name, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Myoho-renge-kyo is the full title of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese and literally translates as 'The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful (Mystic) Law'.

Because the Law expounded in the Lotus Sutra is difficult to fathom and comprehend, it is called the Mystic Law (*myoho*).

The lotus (*renge*) is used as a metaphor to describe the distinctive characteristics of the Mystic Law.

Though it grows in muddy water, the lotus remains unsullied by its environment, producing pure and fragrant blooms. This conjures images of those who have faith in and practise the Mystic Law. Though they



live in the real world that is rife with suffering, they remain pure in thought and action, teaching others and guiding them to enlightenment.

In addition, the lotus, unlike other plants, contains a seed pod (the lotus fruit) within its buds, and the flower and fruit grow and appear at the same time. The flower (the cause) and the fruit (the effect) exist together, simultaneously. This is also used to illustrate that the state of Buddhahood, though indiscernible, exists even in the lives of ordinary people who have not yet manifested that state of life, and further that even after one becomes a Buddha, one does not lose the life-states that characterise an ordinary person.

*Kyo*, meaning 'sutra', indicates that the Lotus Sutra (*Myoho-enge-kyo*) contains the eternal truth – the Mystic Law – and that people should venerate and place their faith in it.

*Nam*, or *namu*, is the phonetic rendering in Chinese characters of the Sanskrit word *namas*, meaning 'bow' or 'reverence'. This term was also translated using the Chinese characters meaning 'to dedicate one's life' (*kimyo*). To dedicate one's life, in this sense, means to devote oneself body and mind to the Law and strive to practise and embody it with one's entire being.

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the very heart and essence of the Buddha, which is expressed in wise and compassionate action to lead all people to enlightenment.

### Nichiren Daishonin's enlightened state of life

Although the Lotus Sutra teaches the fundamental Law of the universe and life, it does not reveal the exact nature or name of the Law.

Nichiren Daishonin awakened to the truth that the Law expounded

in the Lotus Sutra existed in his own life, and he revealed that Law to be Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

In other words, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is not simply 'Myoho-enge-kyo', the title of the Lotus Sutra, prefaced by the word 'nam', but the name of the Law itself.

By revealing the Law to be Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the Daishonin opened the way in real terms for fundamentally freeing people from suffering and delusion, which arise from ignorance of the true nature of their lives, and helping them build unshakeable happiness.

That is why we revere Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, an age filled with confusion and suffering.

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the enlightened life-state of Buddhahood, or true identity, of Nichiren Daishonin, who embodied in his being the Law that pervades the universe and all existence.

### Ordinary people are themselves the Mystic Law

The life-state of Buddhahood is also inherent in the lives of unenlightened ordinary people – in every person. All people are inherently and originally Nam-myoho-enge-kyo itself.

However, while ignorant of this truth, ordinary people are unable to demonstrate the power and functions of the Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo that exist within them. To be awakened to this truth is the life-state of a Buddha; to doubt or be unaware of this truth is the life-state of one who is unenlightened. When we have faith in and actually practise Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the power and functions of the Mystic Law are activated and expressed in our lives, and in this way we manifest the life-state of Buddhahood.

### The object of devotion for practice, revealed in the form of a mandala

Nichiren Daishonin depicted his own Buddhahood, or enlightened life-state, in the form of a mandala. He made this the object of devotion (Gohonzon) for our Buddhist practice, so that we ordinary people can manifest Nam-myoho-enge-kyo in our lives and attain Buddhahood, just as he did.

The Daishonin wrote, 'Never seek this Gohonzon [object of devotion] outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.' ('The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon', WND-1, p. 832)

It is important that we revere Nam-myoho-enge-kyo – the fundamental Law and the life-state of Buddhahood embodied in the Gohonzon – believing and accepting that it is inherent in our own lives. By doing so, we can tap the Mystic Law that resides within us and manifest our inherent Buddhahood.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says, 'Great joy [is what] one experiences when one understands for the first time that one's mind from the very beginning has been a Buddha. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the greatest of all joys.' (OTT, pp. 211-12)

When we realise that we are inherently Buddhas and Nam-myoho-enge-kyo itself, we can bring forth in our lives wonderful benefit and good fortune without measure. There is no greater joy in life.

When we triumph over hardships through our practice of the Mystic Law, we will lead lives of unsurpassed joy while developing a state of eternally indestructible happiness. •

## Gosho: ‘On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime’

Study material part 3

From *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Volume 1, pp. 3-5

If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-rence-kyo. Chanting Myoho-rence-kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life.

The Lotus Sutra is the king of sutras, true and correct in both word and principle. Its words are the ultimate reality, and this reality is the Mystic Law (*myoho*). It is called the Mystic Law because it reveals the principle of the mutually inclusive relationship of a single moment of life and all phenomena. That is why this sutra is the wisdom of all Buddhas.

Life at each moment encompasses the body and mind and the self and environment of all sentient beings in the Ten Worlds as well as all insentient beings in the three thousand realms, including plants, sky, earth, and even the minutest particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the entire realm of phenomena and is revealed in all phenomena. To be awakened to this principle is itself the mutually inclusive relationship of life at each moment and all phenomena. Nevertheless, even though you chant

and believe in Myoho-rence-kyo, if  
you think the Law is outside  
yourself, you are embracing not the  
Mystic Law



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### The metaphor of polishing a mirror

The Daishonin says with regard to chanting as a practice for polishing our life:

A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena [i.e., the Dharma nature] and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. (WND-1, p.4)

The mirror metaphor here is truly inspired. The mirror being endowed with the property of reflection corresponds to our life being endowed with the mystic truth. But if a mirror is not polished, it will naturally become clouded. Since mirrors in the Daishonin's day were typically made of bronze, they would readily tarnish. When a mirror is tarnished, it cannot fulfil its original function, so it has to be polished regularly. Similarly, if our life is neglected and left uncultivated, it will be shrouded in ignorance. Hence, the mirror analogy. The act of polishing is indispensable for restoring the mirror's innate property. Moreover, just polishing a mirror once is not enough. We have to keep polishing it if we wish it to retain its reflective property. As this metaphor aptly attests, our practice of chanting daimoku is a struggle to polish our life, thereby wiping away the dust of ignorance and heightening the brilliance of our enlightened Dharma nature. This practice of polishing our life may be seen as having two aspects. One is to arouse deep faith, as the Daishonin exhorts (WND-1, p.4). This could also be articulated as summoning the fighting spirit to battle our inner darkness. The other aspect is to continue making steadfast efforts, in accord with the Daishonin's admonition that we should 'diligently polish our mirror day and night' (WND-1, p.4).

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, *SGI Newsletter* No. 6905

but an inferior teaching. 'Inferior teaching' means those other than this [Lotus] sutra, which are all expedient and provisional. No expedient or provisional teaching leads directly to enlightenment, and without the direct path to enlightenment you cannot attain Buddhahood, even if you practise lifetime after lifetime for countless *kalpas*. Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime is then impossible. Therefore, when you chant *myoho* and recite *renge*,<sup>1</sup> you must summon up deep faith that Myoho-rence-kyo is your life itself.

You must never think that any of the eighty thousand sacred teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime or any of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three existences are outside yourself. Your practice of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of the sufferings of birth and death in the least unless you perceive the true nature of your life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, then your performing even ten thousand practices and ten thousand good deeds will be in vain. It is like the case of a poor man who spends night and day counting his neighbour's wealth but gains not even half a coin. That is why the T'ien-t'ai school's commentary states, 'Unless one perceives the nature of one's life, one cannot eradicate one's grave offences.'<sup>2</sup> This passage implies that, unless one perceives the nature of one's life, one's practice will become an endless, painful

<sup>1</sup> 'Chant myoho and recite rene' means to chant the daimoku of the Mystic Law, or Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

<sup>2</sup> *The Annotations on 'Great Concentration and Insight'.*





austerity. Therefore, such students of Buddhism are condemned as non-Buddhist. *Great Concentration and Insight* states that, although they study Buddhism, their views are no different from those of non-Buddhists.

Whether you chant the Buddha's name,<sup>3</sup> recite the sutra, or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits and roots of goodness in your life. With this conviction you should strive in faith. The Vimalakirti Sutra states that, when one seeks the Buddhas' emancipation in the minds of ordinary beings, one finds that ordinary beings are the entities of enlightenment, and that the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana. It also states that, if the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds.

It is the same with a Buddha and an ordinary being. When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

What then does *myo* signify? It is simply the mysterious nature of our life from moment to moment, which the mind cannot comprehend or words express.

When we look into our own mind at any moment, we perceive neither colour nor form to verify that it exists. Yet we still cannot say it does not exist, for many differing thoughts continually occur. The mind cannot be considered either to exist or not to exist. Life is indeed an elusive reality that transcends both the words and concepts of existence and nonexistence. It is neither existence nor nonexistence, yet exhibits the qualities of both. It is the mystic entity of the Middle Way that is the ultimate reality. *Myo* is the name given to the mystic nature of life, and *ho*, to its manifestations. *Renge*, which means lotus flower, is used to symbolise the wonder of this Law. If we understand that our life at this moment is *myo*, then we will also understand that our life at other moments is the Mystic Law.<sup>4</sup> This realisation is the mystic *kyo*, or sutra. The Lotus Sutra is the king of sutras, the direct path to enlightenment, for it explains that the entity of our life, which manifests either good or evil at each moment, is in fact the entity of the Mystic Law.

If you chant Myoho-enge-kyo with deep faith in this principle, you are certain to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. That is why the sutra states, 'After I have passed into extinction, [one] should accept and uphold this sutra. Such a person assuredly and without doubt will attain the Buddha way.'<sup>5</sup> Never doubt in the slightest.

Maintain your faith and attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

Respectfully.  
Nichiren •

## Background

This letter was written to Toki Jonin in the seventh year of Kencho (1255), two years after Nichiren Daishonin established his teaching of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. At the time of this letter, the Daishonin was thirty-four years old and was living in Kamakura, the seat of the military government. Toki was a staunch follower of the Daishonin who lived in Wakamiya in Shimosa Province. He received some thirty letters, including 'Letter from Sado' and one of the major treatises, 'The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind'. A retainer of Lord Chiba, the constable of Shimosa, Toki had become a follower of the Daishonin around 1254. Of all his writings from the mid-1250s, 'On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime' focuses most clearly on the tenets of the Daishonin's Buddhism; many of the other works of this period are aimed chiefly at refuting the erroneous doctrines of other schools and discussing theoretical questions. This short essay not only reflects the theories T'ien-t'ai formulated based on the Lotus Sutra, but also reveals the concrete practice for attaining Buddhahood – namely, chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo – that is missing in T'ien-t'ai's theoretical framework. Myoho-enge-kyo is the title of the Lotus Sutra, but to the Daishonin it is much more; it is the essence of the sutra, the revelation of the supreme Law itself. Apparent in this work are both the depth of his thought and his conviction that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the only teaching that can lead people to Buddhahood in this lifetime.

3 As used here, 'the Buddha's name' denotes Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

4 This sentence can also be interpreted to read, 'If one understands that one's life is *myo*, then one also understands that others' lives are all entities of the Mystic Law.'

5 Lotus Sutra, chap. 21.

# SGI President Ikeda's lecture on 'On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime'

## Study material part 4

**From SGI President  
Daisaku Ikeda's lecture  
on 'On Attaining Buddhahood  
in This Lifetime', extracts  
from *SGI Newsletter*  
Nos. 6753 and 6820**

**T**he practice of chanting daimoku is the foundation of the Daishonin's lifetime teachings. The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, unlike the established Buddhist schools of his day, was not dedicated to the worship of a specific god or Buddha. The Daishonin established the means for all people to achieve enlightenment, the ideal of the Lotus Sutra, by formulating the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which enables us to activate our inherent Buddha nature and manifest it as the life-state of Buddhahood.

There are two aspects of the daimoku in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism: the daimoku of faith and the daimoku of practice. The daimoku of faith refers to the spiritual aspect of our practice. This essentially consists of the struggle we wage in our hearts against our inner delusion or darkness; a battle against the negative and destructive forces within us. It means breaking through the darkness clouding our Buddha nature and bringing forth the life-state of Buddhahood through the power of faith. The daimoku of practice, meanwhile, refers to chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo ourselves and also teaching it to others. It means making efforts in word and deed for the happiness of ourselves and others as evidence of our spiritual struggle against inner negativity and illusion.

When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we are both chanting the name of, and calling forth, the Buddha nature in our own lives and the lives of others. When our faith wins out over inner doubt and delusion, the power of our inherent Buddha nature is called forth by the sound of our daimoku and spontaneously manifests in our lives.

The key point that set the Daishonin's Buddhism apart from the other Buddhist schools of his day was the



DEBBIE RIPLEY

establishment of this concrete means for attaining Buddhahood. And from the time he first declared Nam-myoho-enge-kyo until the moment of his death, the Daishonin ardently strove to teach this supreme path of enlightenment to people throughout the land.

In the opening passage of 'On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime', the Daishonin clearly and fully articulates the basic philosophy of salvation that lies at the heart of his teaching, which exists for the happiness of all humanity:

If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-enge-kyo. Chanting Myoho-enge-kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life. (WND-1, p. 3)

I would like to discuss the profound meaning of this passage in detail next time. But briefly, it says that by manifesting within us the mystic truth inherent in all living beings, we can free ourselves of the endless sufferings of birth and death. The name of that mystic truth is Myoho-enge-kyo, and the way to manifest it is through chanting Myoho-enge-kyo.

### **The significance of our existence as human beings**

Nevertheless, even though you chant and believe in Myoho-enge-kyo, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but an inferior teaching. (WND-1, p. 3)

The concept of 'attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime' refers to an ordinary person becoming enlightened during the course of their present existence. What this also means, by extension, is that they can achieve this just as they are. As such, 'attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime' means the same thing as 'attaining Buddhahood in one's present form', which is the

approach to Buddhahood found in the Lotus Sutra and illustrated by the example of the dragon king's daughter in the sutra's 'Devadatta' (twelfth) chapter.

This view contrasts sharply with the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, which expound that one can become enlightened only after practising austerities over countless lifetimes. Because the life-state of Buddhahood is at one with the eternal Mystic Law and abounds with infinite wisdom and compassion, it tended to be seen as something completely separate and removed from the lives of ordinary people steeped in illusion. Attaining enlightenment was thought to require overcoming the unfathomably deep chasm between the spiritual states of a Buddha and ordinary people, and this gave rise to the idea that it was necessary to carry out austere practices for innumerable *kalpas*...

...The human heart is sensitive, multifaceted and rich, and has the capacity to achieve incredible feats. But for that very reason, it often also undergoes great suffering and torment. Likewise, the human heart can become

## Notes

trapped in an endless, negative downward spiral. Will our lives transmigrate forever in the paths of evil, or can we succeed in moving them into an orbit of good?

As evidenced in many of his writings, the Daishonin repeatedly stresses the crucial importance of the heart or mind. It is in this inner realm of life that the potential resides for dramatic shifts from evil to good or from good to evil. That is why the Daishonin's teaching of enlightenment can be viewed as a process that begins with inner change. In other words, through the power of faith, we can defeat the negative functions inside us – workings that are governed by the fundamental darkness that resides in all human hearts – and manifest the positive functions of life that are one with the Dharma nature – that is, our Buddhahood.

This present lifetime, in which we have been born as human beings, represents a golden opportunity to ensure that our lives no longer transmigrate in the evil paths but instead traverse through the paths of good.

## Emphasis on inner change

Therefore, when you chant *myoho* and recite *renge*,<sup>1</sup> you must summon up deep faith that Myoho-rence-kyo is your life itself. (WND-1, p. 3)

Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. (WND-1, p. 4)

In 'On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime', the Daishonin thoroughly explains that we cannot achieve enlightenment without a profound change in our lives themselves – that is, a change in our hearts and minds.

First of all, he says that the mystic truth with which all living beings are endowed reveals 'the principle of the mutually inclusive relationship of a single moment of life and all phenomena'. (WND-1, p. 3) What this means is that our lives or our minds at each moment both embody all phenomena and pervade all phenomena. This could be described as a state of life of oneness with the universe.

Also, the Daishonin warns that if we seek the Mystic Law outside ourselves, then no matter how much daimoku we chant, we will not be able to attain enlightenment; on the contrary, our Buddhist practice will only 'become an endless, painful austerity'. (WND-1, p. 4) He clearly states, 'Even though you chant and believe in Myoho-rence-kyo, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but an inferior teaching.' (WND-1, p. 3)

The Daishonin explains that summoning up deep faith is the key to chanting daimoku, and declares that when we do so, we can polish our lives and attain enlightenment. He writes, 'Therefore, when you chant *myoho*

and recite *renge* [i.e., chant daimoku], you must summon up deep faith that Myoho-rence-kyo is your life itself [lit. your mind at each moment]' (WND-1, p. 3) and 'Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.' (WND-1, p. 4)...

## The significance of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime from the individual perspective

...In the Daishonin's Buddhism, 'attaining enlightenment' is not about embarking on some inconceivably long journey to become a resplendent godlike Buddha; it is about accomplishing a transformation in the depths of one's being. This revolutionary view of realising enlightenment fundamentally changed the whole meaning of Buddhist practice as it was traditionally viewed.

In other words, it is not a matter of practising in order to scale the highest summit of enlightenment at some point in the distant future. Rather, it is a constant, moment-to-moment, inner struggle between the opposing courses of revealing our innate Dharma nature or allowing ourselves to be ruled by our fundamental darkness and delusion. This unceasing effort to polish our lives is the heart and essence of Buddhist practice.

Only by winning over our inner darkness and negativity can we be victorious in life and reveal our full potential. The same is true if we wish to savour true fulfilment in our lives. In that sense, I want to emphasise that

<sup>1</sup> 'Chant *myoho* and recite *renge*' means to chant the daimoku of the Mystic Law, or Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.