

## Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin 'The One Essential Phrase' Part 1

### People Who Chant Daimoku Are Never Deadlocked

ALL people share the wish to lead truly joyous lives. Everyone hopes he or she can meet death with a sense of having led a fulfilled existence. In reality, though, these aspirations are seldom met. What, then, should one do?

One of Nichiren Daishonin's disciples put the question this way: "Can one attain Buddhahood just by chanting Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō?" Buddhahood is an immense state in which life is joyful and death is joyful, too. The question, in other words, is whether it is possible to attain such a wonderful state of life by simply chanting daimoku.

The lady Myōhō-ama posed this candid and straightforward question, this inquiry on the most fundamental of issues, to the Daishonin. While several of the Daishonin's followers were known as Myōhō-ama, the one who received this reply is thought to have lived in what is today Okanomiya in Numazu, Shizuoka Prefecture.

In the Daishonin's day, the suffix *-ama* indicated a laywoman of deep faith who, as a sign of her commitment to Buddhism, had cut her hair from waist- to shoulder-length.

Myōhō-ama was in a sense asking this question as a representative of all people of the Latter Day of the Law. The Goshō we will now begin studying<sup>1</sup> is the Daishonin's reply. Let us study it with this in mind.

**First, for you to ask a question about the Lotus Sutra is a rare source of good fortune. In this age of the Latter Day of the Law, those who ask about the meaning of even one phrase or verse of the Lotus Sutra are much fewer than those who can hurl great Mount Sumeru to another land like a stone, or those who can kick the entire galaxy away like a ball. They are even fewer than those who can embrace and teach countless other sutras, thereby enabling the priests and laymen who listen to them to obtain the six mystic powers.<sup>2</sup> Equally rare is a priest who can explain the meaning of the Lotus Sutra and clearly answer questions concerning it. The Hoto chapter in the fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra sets forth the important principle of six difficult and nine easy acts. Your asking a question about the Lotus Sutra is among the six difficult acts. (The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 221)**

NICHIREN Daishonin praises Myōhō-ama, telling her that to ask about the Lotus Sutra is itself extremely rare and a source of great good fortune.

The Lotus Sutra explains the doctrine of the "six difficult and nine easy acts." In addition to those that the Daishonin describes here, the nine easy acts include such feats—all of them impossible from the standpoint of common sense—as walking across a burning prairie carrying a bundle of hay on one's back without

getting burned. The point is that, compared with the six difficult acts, even such things are easy.

The six difficult acts are: to propagate the Lotus Sutra widely, to copy it or cause someone else to copy it, to recite it even for a short while, to teach it to even one person, to hear of the Lotus Sutra and inquire about its meaning, and to accept and maintain faith in the Lotus Sutra after Shakyamuni's passing.

Myoho-ama's asking the Daishonin about the Lotus Sutra corresponds to the noble act of inquiring about its meaning. In addition, the Daishonin points out, it is extremely rare to encounter a person who can correctly answer such a question.

Myoho-ama may well have been hesitant to pose her question, uncertain of the propriety of doing so. But the Daishonin's encouragement doubtless put her mind at ease and lifted her spirits. This was Nichiren Daishonin's way with the people.

In contrast, there are those who take others to task for asking questions, saying things like: "What's that? Don't you even know that?" There are those who put on airs of self-importance when teaching others. Such people fail to realize that they are in effect negating the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi once remarked:

There was a certain teacher who, when a pupil asked a question, would scold the child saying, "Don't you know that yet? You're a real numskull!" But the pupil asked the question because he wanted to learn the answer, not because he wanted to have his intelligence evaluated. This is a case of the teacher failing to recognize the demands of the situation and instead passing judgment.

The blurring of the distinction between recognition of facts and judgmentalism lies at the heart of the intellectual malaise of the present age.

This is a brilliant insight.

Many of the Daishonin's letters are replies to questions from followers. The Daishonin no doubt had an air of openness and accessibility about him that made it possible for people to ask him anything.

Where there is an atmosphere of lively discussion, where people can say or ask anything, it is bright and joyful. In such an environment, there is growth. The rhythm of *kosen-rufu*, of moving forward, is there.

While sounding extremely difficult, the nine easy acts are, for the most part, physical and external in nature, and relate to mystic powers—to what might be called "supernatural abilities." But revolutionizing one's life through following the correct teaching is in fact far more difficult than working "miracles" of this kind.

As a matter of fact, modern materialist civilization, while accomplishing countless "miracles" that were formerly impossible, has not brought about human happiness. The doctrine of the six difficult and nine easy acts sounds a shrill warning against the limitations of this approach.

**This is a sure indication that if you embrace the Lotus Sutra, you will certainly attain Buddhahood in your present form. Since the Lotus Sutra defines our life as the Buddha's property of the Law, our mind as the Buddha's property of wisdom and our actions as the Buddha's property of action, all who embrace and believe in even a single phrase or verse of this sutra [i.e., Nam-myoho-rence-kyo] will be endowed with the benefit of these three properties. (MW-1, 221)**

THE Daishonin says that those who practice the Mystic Law will attain Buddhahood in their present form, meaning in this existence. Each of us, just as we are, will come to shine as a Buddha. This is human revolution.

The teachings expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra taught that the Buddha's body is the property of the Law; the Buddha's mind, the property of wisdom; and the Buddha's compassionate conduct, the property of action. The Buddha was always presented as an extraordinary being to be revered from afar.

By contrast, the Lotus Sutra explains that ordinary people are themselves Buddhas. This is a landmark teaching. The Lotus Sutra explains that the Buddha endowed with the three enlightened properties is the common mortal of *kuon ganjo*. Nichiren Daishonin says that when we embrace the Mystic Law, our lives become the property of the Law; our minds, the property of wisdom; and our actions, the property of action.

Our lives are the property of the Law—this means that our lives, our determination, which is an entity of the oneness of body and mind, becomes one with the Mystic Law. Our lives or determination become the wish for realizing *kosen-rufu*. We can then wholeheartedly devote ourselves to others' happiness.

When we chant daimoku with appreciation at having the rare opportunity to dedicate our lives to such a noble mission, immense vitality wells forth. From the depths of our lives, we tap the wisdom to encourage others and show actual proof. And our conduct, as the Buddha's property of action, translates into value-creating activities perfectly responding to the needs of our circumstances and of those around us.

The basis for this is daimoku. Prayer—deep prayer from the very marrow of our lives. A person of deep prayer, a person who constantly chants the daimoku of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, is never deadlocked.

### **The Mystic Law Is the Essential Wisdom for Becoming Happy**

**Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is only one phrase, but it contains the essence of the entire sutra. You asked whether one can attain Buddhahood only by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, and this is the most important question of all. It is the heart of the entire sutra and the substance of its eight volumes.**

**The spirit within one's body may appear in just his face, and the spirit within his face may appear in just his eyes. Included within the word Japan is all that is within the country's sixty-six provinces: all of the people and animals, the rice paddies and other fields, those of high and low status, the nobles and the**

**commoners, the seven kinds of gems<sup>3</sup> and all other treasures. Similarly, included within the title, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, is the entire sutra consisting of all eight volumes, twenty-eight chapters and 69,384 characters without exception. (MW-1, 221–22)**

THE eyes are indeed the window to the soul. The eyes express a person's life in its totality. Similarly, the immense energy of a nuclear explosion is expressed by the succinct formula  $E=mc^2$ .<sup>4</sup>

While these are merely analogies, the single phrase *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* is the key that unlocks the limitless energy of life. The Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo contains all the wisdom of Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra.

Josei Toda once said: "The Gohonzon is truly great. But because this is so simple, people fail to understand it."

Because the Law is profound, its practice is simple. The more technology advances, machines become simpler to operate. Mr. Toda went so far as to liken the Gohonzon to a "happiness-manufacturing machine." And the switch for turning this machine on is chanting dai-moku for oneself and others. It could be said that Nichiren Daishonin distilled Buddhism down to an essence of irreducible simplicity for all people.

It seems all too simple. When television was invented, though, people were no doubt amazed at how extremely simple and convenient it was. Now television is taken for granted; no one thinks of it as mysterious anymore. The same will be true of the Mystic Law when kosen-rufu is achieved.

President Toda predicted that 200 years later everyone would finally understand the significance of our efforts. He also said, "As science progresses, the validity and correctness of Buddhism will be increasingly borne out."

The air around us is filled with radio waves of various frequencies. While these are invisible, a television set can collect them and turn them into visual images. The practice of chanting daimoku to the Gohonzon aligns the rhythm of our own lives with the world of Buddhahood in the universe. It "tunes" our lives, so to speak, so that we can manifest the power of Buddhahood in our very beings.

The Daishonin indicates in this Goshō that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the heart of the entire Lotus Sutra. It is the "eye" and essential core of Buddhism. A comprehensive compilation of wisdom for helping people become happy, Buddhism has at its essence the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

THIS is why everything becomes a source of value, everything is brought to life, when we base ourselves on daimoku. The Daishonin teaches that *myo* in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo means "to revive, to return to life." Nam-myoho-renge-kyo rejuvenates all knowledge; it revitalizes our daily lives.

People today have a great deal of knowledge. But even though vast bodies of knowledge have been developed in scientific technology, psychology, sociology, economics, politics and other fields, confusion and turmoil in the world continue

unabated. The words of an ancient Greek philosopher, “There are those who lack wisdom even while knowing many things,” seem increasingly relevant. People today are like travelers who wander through a vast desert in search of water, unaware that there is a spring right under their feet.

We possess the essential wisdom for revolutionizing human life and manifesting great states of life. We possess the supreme jewel of humankind. Therefore, we are the people of the greatest wisdom and wealth.

President Toda said: “While people today are extremely greedy, they do not desire the vast benefit of attaining Buddhahood. On this point they could be called unselfish, people of modest wants, or just plain foolish.”

With “great greed” for attaining Buddhahood, let us continue working to develop the state of life of absolute happiness—the state in which life itself is an irrepressible joy—in our own lives, while enabling friends to do the same. □

1. “Myoho-ama Gozen Gohenji” (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1402–03), written in July 1278, when the Daishonin was 57. Editor’s Note: The Gosho text here may differ in places from what appears in the *Major Writings* or other previously published translations. This is so that the wording of the English text will accord more smoothly with the modern Japanese translation of the original Japanese Gosho. (The author is using a modern Japanese rendering of the classical Japanese original as the basis of his lectures in this series.)

2. Six mystic powers: Expounded in the *Kusha Ron*, they are: 1) the power to appear anywhere at will; 2) the power to observe all phenomena in the world, no matter how large or small, near or far; 3) the power to understand all sounds and languages; 4) the power to read minds; 5) the power to know people’s past lifetimes; and 6) the power to be free from all innate desires.

3. Seven kinds of gems: They differ slightly according to different scriptures. “The Emergence of the Treasure Tower,” the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra, defines them as: gold, silver, lapis, coral, agate, pearl and carnelian. From the standpoint of faith, they indicate the seven jewels of the Treasure Tower.

4. Energy equals mass times the speed of light squared.