

5 A Revolutionary View of Buddhahood: 'Embracing the Gohonzon Is in Itself Enlightenment'

Sho-i sha ga. Butsu zo shingon. Hyaku sen man noku. Mushu sho butsu. Jin gyo sho-butsu. Muryo doho.

“What is the reason for this? A Buddha has personally attended a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million, a countless number of Buddhas and has fully carried out an immeasurable number of religious practices. (LS2, 23)

The Teaching for Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime

ACCORDING to this description, a Buddha has served and practiced under an incalculable number of Buddhas for an unimaginably long time. This practice, continued over many lifetimes, becomes the cause for enlightenment; as a result, the practitioner attains the supreme state of Buddhahood. This is termed “practicing toward enlightenment over a period of countless *kalpas*.”

We should bear in mind, however, that this is only a literal interpretation of the causes (practices) made and effects (virtues) realized by the Buddha as described in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Reading this passage from the standpoint of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, President Toda explained that it is not necessary for us to engage in this type of practice for countless kalpas to attain enlightenment. He discussed the meaning of this passage as follows:

From the standpoint of the Daishonin’s teaching, the Buddha [the Gohonzon] of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental Law that gives birth to a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand or a million Buddhas. Therefore, without undertaking any difficult or painful practices, by simply chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we gain more benefit than we could by personally attending that many Buddhas. The benefit of this single practice is equal to that of the immeasurable number of austerities carried out by all Buddhas.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental Law that generates all Buddhas. To put it another way, the fundamental Law that enables all Buddhas to attain enlightenment is not that they have carried out various austerities over countless kalpas, but that they have awakened to the fundamental Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The Buddhist practice of the Latter Day of the Law is to embrace and uphold the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo directly. In the Daishonin’s Buddhism, therefore, it is not necessary to engage in austerities for countless *kalpas* to attain Buddhahood.

Nichiren Daishonin states in “The True Object of Worship”: “Shakyamuni’s practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the

single phrase, Myoho-renge-kyo. If we believe in that phrase, we shall naturally be granted the same benefits as he was" (MW-1, 64). The practices to attain Buddhahood carried out by Shakyamuni and all Buddhas throughout time and space, and the virtues they acquired as a result, are all contained in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Therefore, by embracing the five characters of the Mystic Law, we naturally acquire the benefit of both the practices and the virtues of Shakyamuni and all Buddhas, and are certain to attain Buddhahood. This is the principle "embracing the Gohonzon is in itself enlightenment." It is also termed "attaining Buddhahood in one's present form" and the "immediate attainment of enlightenment."

Nichiren Daishonin says that, for a person who embraces the Mystic Law, "It is not difficult to become a Buddha" (MW-1, 259). Through the Daishonin's teaching, a path leading to Buddhahood has been established for all. Attaining Buddhahood is not something that happens in the distant future or somewhere far away. The Daishonin's Buddhism makes it possible for all people to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

The teaching "embracing the Gohonzon is in itself enlightenment" represents a revolutionary view of what it means to attain Buddhahood. President Toda said, "In contrast to the Buddhas of the 'Expedient Means' chapter who have practiced for tens of millions of years, we can complete our practice for attaining Buddhahood by simply believing in the Gohonzon and chanting the single phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo."

There is immeasurable benefit in chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo even just once. Instantaneously, we gain the full benefit acquired by all Buddhas through their practices of many lifetime over an extremely long time. That's how great is the Mystic Law.

According to the conventional Buddhist view, the process of attaining enlightenment is akin to arduously climbing a mountain road toward the peak of Buddhahood in the far distance. By contrast, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is a teaching that enables all people to reach the summit of enlightenment instantaneously. From the state of Buddhahood, we can gaze down on the surrounding mountains far below and survey the spectacular panorama of nature stretching out in all directions.

We can attain this vast state of Buddhahood directly—right now, right where we are. Then we go out in society and tell others of the exhilaration we experience in manifesting this state of life. This practice represents the quintessence of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Buddhist Practice Means Challenging Ourselves Daily

Yumyo shojin. Myosho fu mon

He has exerted himself bravely and vigorously, and his name is universally known. (LS2, 23)

THIS passage refers to the practices of the Buddhas of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings and the theoretical teaching, or first half, of the Lotus Sutra. At the same time it also provides us an important guideline in faith.

In the first place, “bravely and vigorously” means with faith. In his “Six-volume Writings” (Rokkan Sho), the twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan, citing the interpretation, “‘Bravely’ means to act with courage; ‘vigorously’ means to use every ounce of one’s wisdom,” explains that “bravely and vigorously” means to courageously exercise one’s powers of faith to the fullest.

Buddhist practice has to be carried out with determination and courage. When we challenge ourselves bravely with the spirit to accomplish “more today than yesterday” and “more tomorrow than today,” we are truly practicing.

Without such a brave and vigorous spirit, we cannot break the iron shackles of destiny, nor can we defeat obstacles and devils. Our daily practice of gongyo is a drama of challenging and creating something new in our lives. When we bravely stand up with faith, the darkness of despair and anxiety vanishes from our hearts, and in pours the light of hope and growth. This spirit to stand up courageously is the spirit of faith.

The Buddha Nature Manifests When We Practice With Sincerity and Consistency

FROM the standpoint of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, “ex-ert” means to chant daimoku diligently for the happiness of oneself and others. We can exert ourselves in this fashion only if we possess a brave and vigorous spirit.

High Priest Nichikan, citing Miao-lo’s interpretation of the term *exert* as meaning “pure” and “continuous,” teaches the proper attitude to have in chanting daimoku. He explains that “pure” means unalloyed, and that “continuous” means to practice continuously and unceasingly. In other words, the important thing is that we chant daimoku each day with sincerity and consistency. Only then does it become the practice for polishing our lives and for attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.

The Daishonin says: “If you exert a hundred million aeons of effort in a single moment of life, the three enlightened properties of the Buddha will appear within you at each moment. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the practice of ‘exerting’ oneself” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 790).

In chanting daimoku, we are carrying out the practice of “exerting” ourselves. Therefore, the three enlightened properties, the immeasurable wisdom and compassion of the Buddha, manifest at each moment in the lives of those who possess extremely earnest concern for the Law, and who bravely and tenaciously struggle for its sake. When we have a brave and vigorous spirit of faith, we instantaneously manifest the “mind of the Buddha.” This is what “embracing the Gohonzon is in itself enlightenment” means.

Put another way, the Daishonin is saying that those who bravely and vigorously exert themselves in faith are all Buddhas.

A Life of Continuous 'Self-Improvement'

LET us remember that the SGI has greatly developed precisely because we have bravely and vigorously exerted ourselves in faith—that is, with true earnestness.

Once when asked by a foreign journalist to explain the reason for our great development, I said, "It's because of our wholehearted dedication." The present tremendous advance of kosen-rufu has come about because we have earnestly and wholeheartedly taken action for the sake of friends, society and peace.

A youth once asked Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi how one could develop the ability to judge good and evil. President Makiguchi replied, "If you have the tenacity and courage to practice the world's foremost religion, you will come to understand." He also once said: "You must bravely and vigorously exert yourself. You must take action. Even though I am now an old man, I, too, am practicing in this manner."

"Exerting oneself bravely and vigorously" truly is the wellspring of the Soka Gakkai spirit. When we bravely challenge ourselves through faith, our lives stir, wisdom is born, our beings overflow with joy and hope.

A person of bravery and vigor who continually, moment by moment, makes causes for self-improvement is an eternal victor. Those who struggle with earnestness and broad-mindedness, with the spirit of a lion king, are certainly exerting brave and vigorous effort.

Shine As a 'Celebrity of the Mystic Law'

THE next line, "his name is universally known," means that the names of those who bravely and vigorously exert themselves in their practice will be known far and wide. Because of their brave and vigorous efforts, they win renown. Because of their splendid Buddhist practice, they move the hearts of all Buddhas.

The Daishonin writes to a follower whose husband is seriously ill:

No matter what might befall him on the road between this life and the next, he should declare himself to be a disciple of Nichiren.... My name has reached the pure lands of the ten directions, and heaven and earth surely know of it. If your husband declares that he is Nichiren's disciple, no evil demon can possibly claim ignorance of the name. (MW-5, 281–82)

President Toda often told us that when we go to Eagle Peak, we should proudly declare ourselves "disciples of Josei Toda, the leader of kosen-rufu." The names of those who bravely and vigorously dedicate themselves to kosen-rufu are known to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas in the ten directions, and to Bonten and Taishaku and all Buddhist gods. Their reputation extends throughout the universe.

The reason for this, the sutra explains, is that spreading the correct Buddhist teaching in the Latter Day of the Law is the most difficult undertaking there is. Accordingly, the great achievement of those who actually spread the Lotus Sutra cannot fail to be known to the beings in the worlds of the ten directions.

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Therefore, all Buddhas, bodhisattvas and Buddhist gods in the three existences and the ten directions are sure to protect the courageous men and women who propagate the Mystic Law.

In “Emergence of the Treasure Tower,” the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni says: “This sutra is hard to uphold; if one can uphold it even for a short while [after I have entered extinction] I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas. A person who can do this wins the admiration of the Buddhas” (LS11, 180–81)

And Nichiren Daishonin says: “Now you must build your reputation as a votary of the Lotus Sutra and devote yourself to it” (MW-1, 93); and, “Bring forth the great power of faith and establish your reputation among all the people of Kamakura and the rest of Japan as ‘Shijo Kingo of the Hokke sect’” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 201).

The Daishonin’s intent is for each person to shine as a “celebrity of the Mystic Law” in the community and in society. By making dedicated efforts in faith, we are certain to develop such a reputation.

To win a name for oneself through dedication to the Lotus Sutra is the highest honor. The names of those who struggle for kosen-rufu alongside the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, bloom with an eternal fragrance. They are definitely known to all Buddhas in the ten directions.

The ideals and the movement of the SGI have now spread throughout the world, and as a result, voices far and wide are extolling the worth of Buddhism. This might be seen as corroborating the words, “his name is universally known.”

This propagation, which has brought the Mystic Law to as many as 115 countries and territories, is certainly without precedent in the history of Buddhism. You, the millions of friends who have emerged from the earth, have accomplished this sacred undertaking. No other individuals or groups have dedicated themselves to spreading Buddhism and elevating the Law with such earnestness.

Your names and the name of the SGI will definitely shine with a golden light in the human history, and also resound throughout the universe, reaching the ears of all Buddhas in the ten directions. This is clear in light of the principle “his name is universally known.” □