

**On the Gohonzon: Wisdom King Immovable and Wisdom King Craving-Filled  
Facing Our Desires — Facing Suffering  
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In the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni explains that after he attained enlightenment, he pondered how to share the great Law with common mortals. His thoughts turn to the Buddhas of past ages, who used expedient means to save the people.

Because people have difficulty believing they are potentially Buddhas — and therefore have a hard time embracing the Law that can lead them directly to their Buddhahood — Shakyamuni decides on the same strategy. For infinite kalpas, for instance, he speaks of the “Law of nirvana ending the long sufferings of birth and death” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 44). Of course, Buddhism does not end the sufferings of birth and death; it teaches us how to overcome them, how to find joy in them. But Shakyamuni first taught the Law of nirvana as expedient means to lead people toward this understanding.

Sufferings over our desires and sufferings over death have thus long been a topic of Buddhism. These are at the heart of what motivated Shakyamuni on his quest: He sought a solution to the dilemmas of birth, old age, sickness and death.

Nichiren Daishonin, too, instructed his followers to first understand death. Then, he said, everything else will follow.

Two characters on the Gohonzon, written in the medieval Sanskrit orthography called Siddham, show at work in our life these two principles for transforming suffering. On the right side of the Gohonzon is Wisdom King Immovable (Skt Achala) and on the left, Wisdom King Craving-Filled (Skt Ragarja). (These two are placed in between the Four Heavenly Kings, which are at the four corners of the Gohonzon.)

Wisdom King denotes a king wise enough to defeat devils; this signifies the Mystic Law enabling any person to overcome sufferings over desires and sufferings over death.

In the images of provisional Buddhism adopted after Shakyamuni’s death, Wisdom King Craving-Filled carries a bow and arrow. His role is to put an end to people’s earthly desires and their making of bad causes. In the Daishonin’s Buddhism, as in the Lotus Sutra, enlightenment does not exist apart from desires, just as life cannot be separated from death.

Wisdom King Immovable, who carries a sword in his right hand and a rope in his left, indicates the principle of the sufferings of life and death in themselves being nirvana. When Shakyamuni began to introduce the Law in the “Expedient Means” chapter, he made clear that the goal of nirvana, ending the sufferings of life and death, was an expedient teaching. By practicing to the Gohonzon, the Daishonin taught, this promise comes alive through revealing our eternal Buddhahood just as we are, as common mortals, even in the face of death.

One might ask, regarding the Wisdom Kings, why the Daishonin chose to write their names in Sanskrit. It is recorded that the Daishonin was anticipating the translation of his teachings into Sanskrit and Chinese in the future. This indicates that the Daishonin was thinking of Buddhism as a world religion. It was this thinking that also motivated him to use *nam*, which stems from a Sanskrit word, to indicate devoted practice of the Law, Myoho-rence-kyo.

*Nine in a series*