

**PERSPECTIVE  
A VIEW OF ENLIGHTENMENT  
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My name is Eddie Marashian, though I am also known as Mother, the professional name I sing under. I have been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism since November 1999. I have supported myself as a professional yoga teacher for nearly four years. Before I began chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, I dedicated myself earnestly to the discipline of yoga meditation. Though I became quite adept at the exercises and taught meditation to large numbers of students, I was perplexed by the mystery that surrounded enlightenment. Each secret mantra or technique I learned provided a key that opened another door into what became an endless labyrinth of the soul.

Around the time of my 27th birthday last November, I found myself feeling incredibly frustrated and distraught. At times I could feel a part of my life was transcendent, but for all my meditation efforts, I could not seem to actualize myself in the world.

However, my life changed dramatically within a matter of four days of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and I thank my sister Julianne for her tireless, four-year effort to introduce me to this practice. The egalitarian simplicity and effectiveness of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism won me over instantly.

The following is my perspective on what I find to be so revolutionary about enlightenment from the standpoint of this Buddhism.

In most spiritual disciplines, "enlightenment" is a perplexing concept. Notions such as, "Awareness of the soul"; "Merging with the infinite"; or "Being in nothingness," for instance, are shrouded in language and mysticism far removed from our daily life experience. In fact, enlightenment is often equated with a style of life (ie. in a monastery) and a set of preferences (ie. vegetarianism and billowy white clothing) different from our own.

Yet, as can be seen in the school of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, enlightenment does not have to be such an enigma. In fact, the accessible and applicable nature of enlightenment to our everyday reality is exactly that which sets Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism apart from other practices as both more progressive and in rhythm with the needs of society as a whole. To begin to understand better why this practice is so revolutionary, let us look to *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*—the scriptural text comprised of 172 letters written by the founder of the practice, Nichiren Daishonin, in 13th century Japan.

The concept of enlightenment is clearly spelled out in the letter, "Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood." The Daishonin explains that our Buddhahood, his word for enlightenment, consists of two things: reality and wisdom. Reality is defined as the "true nature of all phenomenon" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 746). From the perspective of each individual's life, this means that we all possess a uniqueness about us that is unparalleled by anything else in the universe. To uncover this uniqueness we must continually ask our selves the following questions: What is the most original aspect of me, providing me with a gift that only I can present to humanity in my special way? Or, what makes me the greatest, most wonderful, most vital person on the entire planet? And what is the one thing that I must achieve with my life that would represent the perfect expression and manifestation of me? To be able to answer these questions honestly is to know your

reality.

So if reality represents our unique nature, then wisdom, the second component of enlightenment, “is the illuminating and manifesting of this true nature” (WND, 746). Wisdom is taking that which is special and unique and creative about each and every one of us and making it a real, living, breathing presence here in the world. Hence, from the perspective of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, enlightenment is neither a state of mind nor being blissed out in meditation. Enlightenment, or Buddhahood, is simply the process of unlocking the door to our long-hidden gifts and bringing them to the light of day here in the world. The words Nam-myoho-renge-kyo represent the key that unlocks that door.

A very wise man taught me recently that our Buddhahood is not just a spiritual awakening, but very much a physical one as well. To support this idea, let us look to the Lotus Sutra, the final teaching of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, and the teaching that this school of Buddhism is based upon. The final lines of chapter 16, the “Life Span” chapter—considered to be the heart of the Sutra—are, “At all times I think to myself, how can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way, and quickly acquire the body of the Buddha?”

Make note that Shakyamuni does not say the heart of the Buddha. Nor does he say the mind or the meditative appearance of a Buddha. He says the body of a Buddha, meaning that we are all here on Earth to embody our truth and to become the physical vehicle capable of walking through the world perpetuating that truth on a daily basis for the benefit of all society. Though meditation possesses value, our purpose in life is not simply to sit cross-legged and to attain a state in which we feel our own awareness merge with the infinite.

Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi and Daisaku Ikeda—arguably the three greatest spiritual leaders of the past century—proved beyond a doubt that only truth put into fearless action can make a significant impact on the quality of life experienced by humanity as a whole.

Nichiren Daishonin urges us to take “the riverbed of reality and to fill it with the water of wisdom” (WND, 746). In other words, just as the path of a riverbed will invariably direct the water of the river to its destination of the sea, so will the riverbed of our unique and true nature fuse with the water of our innate wisdom to deliver us to our happiness, purpose and destination in life. Whether we are rich or poor, black or white, gay or straight, doctor or doorman is irrelevant. All that matters is that we each learn to take who we are at our core and use it to make a difference in our own community and environment: I think this is enlightenment!