

Nichiren Buddhism

By

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Abstract

Though one might point at the earth and miss it, though one might bind up the sky, though the tides might cease to ebb and flow, and the sunrise in the West, it could never come about that the prayers of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra would go unanswered.”

Keywords

Kosen-Rufu, Soka Gakkai, Bodhisattvas, Sensei, Liturgy, Gongyo, Gosho, Diamoku

Introduction: Lineage

Shakyamuni Buddha lived around 2500 years ago and is known as the founder of Buddhism. All his teachings are put together in various sutras, of which the Lotus Sutra is supreme.

Eight centuries ago Nichiren Diashonin, a Japanese sage 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* on April 28, 1253.

He confirmed that the Lotus Sutra is the foremost among all the Buddhist Sutra and that the law of *Nam- Myoho- Renge-Kyo* to which he awakened, is the essence of the Sutra and that it pervades the entire universe and life.



Image 1: Nichiren Daishonin

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

Daishonin writes, “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- Renge-Kyo.”

Myoho-Renge-Kyo is the Japanese title of the Lotus Sutra(Saddharma-pundarika-sutra in Sanskrit).Chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is often referred to as Daimoku(a Japanese word) which means– “ I devote myself to the mystic law of cause and effect.”

Because the law expounded in Lotus Sutra is difficult to fathom and comprehend, it is called the Mystic Law (Myoho)

Nam: is the Sanskrit word added as a prefix which means bow or reverence.

Myoho means the Mystic law — the eternal truth or principle that permeates all phenomena.

Myo is the name given to the mystic nature of life and ‘ho’ to its manifestations.

Renge means the Lotus flower. The Lotus is the only flower that seeds and blooms at the same time symbolizing the simultaneity of cause and effect. Though it grows in the muddy water, the Lotus remains unsullied by its environment, producing pure and fragrant blooms. It also represents the inherent power of human life to utilize sufferings or problems(ie the

muddy water) positively as nourishment to bloom as a beautiful lotus unaffected by the muddy pond.

Kyo means the ‘sutra, the voice or teaching of a Buddha. It also represents the eternity of life.

Our Prayer: Gongyo and Daimoku

The Soka Gakkai Liturgy (a small booklet) of Gongyo contains excerpts from the 2nd (Expedient Means) and 16th (Life Span) chapters of the Lotus Sutra.

Chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is described as the “primary practice” and reciting Gongyo is called the “supplementary practice”.

Doing morning Gongyo and Daimoku is like charging our engine for the day. It is the time to activate our Buddha hood and pray for what we wish to achieve during the day.

Evening Gongyo and Daimoku allow us to chant with profound gratitude and enable us to re-determine for the next day.

The Daishonin writes, “Though one might point at earth and miss it, though one might bind up the sky, though tides may cease to ebb and flow and the sunrise in the west, it could never come about that the prayers of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra would go and unanswered.”

We can be sure that all our prayers will be answered. But the crucial thing is – are we practicing correctly? Are we chanting with belief and conviction?

The power of our faith and practice determines how our prayers get answered.

The Three Pillars

Faith, Practice, and Study: The purpose of Nichiren Buddhism is to enable us to transform our lives at the deepest fundamental level.

Faith means belief in the Buddhism of Nichiren Diashonin - the correct teaching of the latter Day of the law - and in the Gohonzon, its ultimate expression.

The practice consists of chanting Nam- Myoho- Renge-Kyo with faith in the Gohonzon, teaching others about the benefit of faith in the Gohonzon, and encouraging them to practice too.

Study means learning and inquiry into the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. His writings comprised, letters of encouragement written to the disciples, known as Gosho. It provides us with the guiding principles for proper faith and practice, helping us strengthen our practice and deepen our faith.

Nichiren Diashonin states: “Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others; both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or a phrase.”

The Ten Worlds

The Ten Worlds is a classification of 10 distinct states of life. By examining the 10 worlds, we can understand the nature of our own state of life and gain insights into how we can transform it.

The first six worlds - those of hell, hungry spirits, animals, asuras, human beings, and heavenly beings - are known as 6 paths.

The remaining four - those of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas - are known as 4 noble worlds.

Lotus Sutra teaches that the Ten Worlds are 10 states of life inherent within each living being.

It reveals that the living beings of the nine worlds from hell through the world of bodhisattvas possess within them the world of Buddhas and that Buddhas also possess all the other nine worlds.

“The mutual possession of the ten worlds expounded in the Lotus Sutra is the fundamental principle that enables all people to transform their state of life.”

“Strong faith in the Lotus Sutra is called the world of Buddhahood.”

Lotus Sutra here means the Gohonzon that embodies Nam-myoho-renge-kyo - The Lotus Sutra of the Latter Day of the Law.

Therefore having ‘strong faith’ to base our lives on the Gohonzon is nothing other than the life state of Buddhahood.

This life state of Buddhahood attained through faith in the mystic law can be described as a state of absolute happiness that nothing can destroy.

The life state of Buddhahood is often likened to the spirit of a lion king - a state of complete ease and confidence in which, like the lion king, one fears nothing.

Bodhisattvas of the Earth

All disciples who follow Nichiren Buddhism are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Living beings are born in particular times and places because of two different kinds of causes - that is they are born either according to their wishes and vows or as a result of their karma.

Buddhism explains that Bodhisattvas are born into this world out of a wish to fulfill their vow, given in the remote past to the Buddha, to be born into the Saha(evil) world, undergo all sufferings, win over them, and encourage others to win over their struggles too.

In Lotus Sutra it is called the principle of voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma(to fulfill one's vow).

In other words, when we change our karma into a mission, we transform our destiny from playing a negative role to a positive one - and proceed toward the goal of transforming our destiny. As it is a two-way practice - chanting for oneself and others; by chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo we try to bring happiness in our lives as well as the lives of others.

Soka Gakkai

Today it is the Soka Gakkai, an organization that has inherited and is carrying on the Diashonin's spirit.

We can find the origins of Soka Gakkai in the relationship of mentor and disciple that existed between the three presidents.

The leaders who have firmly established the practice, awareness, and resolve for achieving kosen-rufu in modern times are the Soka Gakkai's first three presidents:

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (First, President)

Josei Toda (Second President,)

Daisaku Ikeda (Third President)

Together they are respected as the

Soka Gakkai's three founding presidents.

Sensei is the honorific title used for each president as a mark of respect.



Image 2: Soka Gakkai: Presidents

Soka Gakkai Day

May 3rd is commemorated as Soka Gakkai Day - The day Josei Toda was inaugurated as the Second president in 1951 and Daisaku Ikeda as the third Soka Gakkai President in 1960.

The first three Soka Gakkai presidents -united by the bonds of mentor and disciple, sharing the great vow for kosen - rufu and directly connected to Nichiren Diashonin - have remained unswayed by even the fiercest storms, like the Himalayas that rise from the earth and soar high into the heavens.

Bharat Soka Gakkai(BSG) established on 3rd Jan 1986 is affiliated to Soka Gakkai Global following the philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism.

Drawing inspiration from each other, BSG members engage in their self-improvement with a belief that a fundamental change in a single individual can bring about great transformation in society.

Nichiren Buddhism teaches the principle of cherry, plum, peach, and damson.

A Cherry tree will bear cherry fruit and a plum tree will bear a plum fruit. A plum cannot be a cherry and a cherry cannot be a plum. Similarly, we are all unique in ourselves. We should bring out our genuineness from within us.

To live genuinely in a way that is true to yourself, you need to carry out your own human revolution - that is to continue to develop yourself at the deepest level.

Each of us possesses within us, like a dormant seed, the potential to fulfill a unique and important mission in life. The purpose of life is to make that seed sprout and flower to the fullest.

President Ikeda says, "Faith in the mystic law means, 'not envying others or demeaning yourself. It means living true to yourself and fulfilling your own unique mission in your own unique way. It also means to become a person you yourself can respect and be proud of.'"

References

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About the Author

An Educator, Voice modulator, Author & Poet, Radio-Artist, and Creative Artist for Crafts and Dramatics, Kiren Babal has a rich experience of 40 years; with a flair for writing both in English and Hindi.

To her credit, she has many children's books, poetry books, and anthologies both in English and Hindi. Her focus always remained on keeping her hobbies alive.

She is passionate about storytelling and loves to interact with NGO children by way of storytelling.

Life unfolds itself in all her creative pursuits, be it writing, singing, painting, poetry, storytelling, or social services. The journey goes on.

