

DHARMA ESSAY

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(Chapter V)

THE SACRED TITLE OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

(O'DAIMOKU)

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O'DAIMOKU **(THE SACRED TITLE OF THE LOTUS SUTRA)**

Meaning of “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo”

(LOTUS #45, March/April, 2002)

This year is the 750th anniversary (as celebrated in Japan) since Saint Nichiren chanted the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra, or O'Daimoku, on April 28, 1253. The Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple will celebrate this anniversary in 2003. Preceding this event, I would like to talk about the O'Daimoku in this and following issues.

Many people ask me, “What does ‘Namu Myoho Renge Kyo’ mean? “*Namu*” means to devote, to adore or to follow.

Originally the Chinese character, “*Ho*” means the law, the way and standards. The laws here means the Reality of All things revealed in the Lotus Sutra. “*Ho*” in “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo” has a three-fold meaning of regulations, creed, and truth in Japanese. In English, “*Ho*” literally means laws.

The first meaning, regulations, are those set by human beings depending on their situation, like driving on the right side of the road (in America), stopping at red signals, and going on green signals. These rules differ depending on the place and time. These are set for the convenience of those who live there. The constitution, traffic rules, and by-laws are good examples.

The second meaning focuses on how to make people follow these regulations. One keeps a creed that depends on one's belief. Therefore, the methods of teaching the regulations differ depending upon religion, race, place, and time. For instance, “Thou shall not kill,” could be taught for the following reasons 1) God commands it, 2) If I go against it, I will be punished, 3) If I kill someone, I will be in jail. However, soldiers are taught to kill, and one may be justified in killing another in self-defense. Many laws do not apply depending on the place, the time, and the society because their creeds are different.

The third is truth. Truth does not change due to one's faith, country, time, and race. Therefore, truth stands above the laws made by human beings and creeds made by religions. “*Ho*” includes all three laws. This “*Ho*” in the “Namu Myo-HO Renge Kyo,” sometimes acts strangely and mystically beyond our understandings; therefore, it is modified by “*Myo*,” “*Myoho*.”

The lotus flowers, or “*Renge*,” express the universal laws such as Inter-Dependent Existence, Uncertainty of Life, Cause and Effect, Purity and Eternity like the Oga lotus seeds. The lotus grows in muddy ponds and blooms into beautiful flowers. The flowers and leaves are never stained with the dirty water because the leaves and flowers have a waxy surface that repels water. Human beings are easily stained with the wrong, but the lotus flower keeps its purity.

In fact, without the muddy water, the lotus will never grow. The fact that beautiful flowers bloom only from the muddy water symbolizes the law of Inter Dependent Existence. Similarly, the bad and the good exist together in a society.

Most trees and plants bloom from small seeds. However, the lotus is unique to have its flower and seeds at the same time. People often forget that a beautiful flower is the result of the small seed growing. Just the same, people forget that it may be their bad deeds and actions that may have caused an adverse effect on them and they blame others for their misfortune. In this manner, the lotus flower reminds us of the law of Cause and Effect.

The life of a lotus flower lasts only for four days. It symbolizes the law of Uncertainty of Life.

Thus, the lotus flower symbolizes the universal laws. The flower also symbolizes truth, purity, and beauty that most religions seek. The Buddha Sakyamuni expounded these truths with similes, through his previous lives, parables, and his speeches in the scripture, or “*Kyo*,” called “Myoho Renge Kyo.”

To obey, to adore and to devote oneself these universal laws are “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.” When we keep up a well-regulated life; truth, purity, and beauty will follow after us. Let us chant the O’Daimoku and live with regularity.

Sacred Title Is the Light

(May 1, 1997)

Chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra states, "Those who expound this sutra will be able to illuminate the darkness of living beings the same as the light of the sun and the moon illuminate all darkness."

The light of the full moon illuminates the darkness of night. The light of the sun takes darkness away completely. The small flame of a match will brighten its surroundings. Thus, in this degenerated world we need more light.

Nichiren Dai'Shonin's boyhood name was Rencho. At the age of 32, he changed it to Nichiren. We find the sun signified in "Nichi" of Nichiren. He chose his name from the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren's belief brightens the suffering of this dark world as the moon illuminates it in the night. "Ren" signified in "ren-ge" as a lotus flower, a symbol of purity.

On the *Mandala Gohonzon*, the central item of the Nichiren Buddhist altar with, the "Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo" written in the center. The writing style of the sacred title is called "mustache" because the brush strokes appear to look like a man's mustache. The strokes are purposely done this way to signify rays of light.

St. Nichiren states that we are brightened with the rays of the "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" to become more perfect beings. Thus, when we chant the Sacred Title and live in the faith, our Buddha natures appear in our daily lives, and all our lives are blessed with Buddha's compassion.

Light possesses the power to heat, to burn things, to kill bacteria, to purify, to illuminate, to brighten things, and to accelerate the growth of plants and animals. When we put our faith in the Sacred Title and chant it, we are able to eliminate our sins or bad karma to purify our body and mind, to stimulate our growth and to experience the joy for living.

Please chant the Sacred Title. Only people who chant the "Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo" are able to experience this joy.

O'Daimoku Is a Wonderful Remedy

(LOTUS #46, May/June, 2002)

Nichiren Buddhists always chant the O'Daimoku because it is a wonderful remedy to cure our sufferings, to save us from troubles, and to maintain our peaceful minds.

Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra reveals the parable of "An Excellent Physician."

There was once an excellent and wise physician, who could cure all manner of diseases. He had many children. One day, while their father was traveling away in a distant land, his children got into the medicine room and began to sample what they found there. They tasted many different medicines, enjoying the taste, and it was too late before they realized that some of them were poisonous. They fell to the floor, writhing in agony.

Fortunately, the father returned soon afterwards. He was shocked to find them in so much pain. The father knew exactly what to do and mixed several ingredients to make a remedy with a good color, taste, and fragrance. Then he gave it to the children. Some took it immediately and were cured. Others had to be forced to take it. Still others refused to take it at all, but later took it and recovered from the poison when they heard that their father had died far away during a trip.

Nichiren Dai'Shonin said that the remedy that the physician made is the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra, "Myoho Renge Kyo." The physical body of the excellent doctor could not save the poisoned children but the remedy did when the children took it. Therefore, to chant the O'Daimoku is the same as taking the remedy.

Myoho Renge Kyo is the Japanese name of the Lotus Sutra, one of the important Buddhist scriptures. It is the most excellent teaching and truth. A name is important because it signifies everything within it. As the United States of America includes the fifty states, its government, people, culture, history and others, the sacred title of the scripture contains all of Buddha's teachings. Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo consists of five characters. The Lotus Sutra has about 70,000 Chinese characters. When we chant these seven words of O'Daimoku once, it equals reading through the sutra composed of the 70,000 letters once.

Nichiren Shonin also said that a baby drinks milk given by his mother without knowing the nutritious value, and then the baby grows. Similarly, although you do not understand the full meaning of "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" or the content of the sutra, when you chant it, you will be all right because the Eternal Buddha Sakyamuni blessed you with his compassion and all deities are protecting you. Nichiren's faith is based on complete trust in the O'Daimoku.

When we chant this Sacred title, we attain new life. When we chant it, we should be fully aware that we are doing so, not only for our own sake but also for others.

To chant the O'Daimoku is to devote, to obey, to adore, and to devote the universal laws that the Buddha Sakyamuni revealed to one's life. Thus, you will naturally become harmonized with the universe and receive various merits.

People experience many different kinds of merits such as quick recovery from illness, good business, good relationship with others, peace of mind, and so on.

If you would like to experience something extra ordinary, please chant it for one hour about the same time of the day everyday for one week, three weeks or one month depending on how serious your prayer is.

One Breath – One O’Daimoku

(LOTUS #50, January/February, 2003)

Someone asked me how many times a day we should chant the O’Daimoku? The answer is that the number does not matter. Over 20 years ago, I went to a golf range to hit balls a few times a week. But I did not improve much, so I quit playing golf. When hitting golf balls, you must first learn the basics, such as how you should stand, how to grip the club, how to turn your upper body, how to aim towards the hole and so on. If you don’t, you will not improve even if you hit 1,000 balls everyday.

At the Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple, we have *Shodai-gyo* Practice once a month. *Shodai-gyo* is the practice of chanting the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra. We begin with meditation before chanting. We start the chanting very slowly. Gradually we increase the speed of the chanting and maintain a high speed for a while, then once again slow down the chanting gradually and finally stop. It is like a long freight train that starts moving very slowly at the departing point. It gradually speeds up and then maintains that same speed. When it approaches the next stop, it slows down gradually before it comes to a complete stop. When we chant the O’Daimoku vigorously with a loud voice, our body heats up, and we sometime perspire, but we feel very good.

During chanting, it is very important for us to know how to inhale and exhale. When you chant in the right way, you feel very good, and it is good for your health both mentally and physically. This is due to the blood circulating very well through-out your body. The correct way of chanting is One Breath – One O’Daimoku: that is to chant the O’Daimoku once vocally very slowly while concentrating on each of the seven letters of the O’Daimoku. When you chant it vocally, you are exhaling once. When you inhale slowly, you chant it once in your mind without voice. Then you repeat the chanting vocally once while exhaling and without voice while inhaling as many times as you feel comfortable. You can practice One Breath – One O’Daimoku while you drive a car or while you walk or jog.

However, you must sit in front of the Gohonzon in order to concentrate yourself on the seven letters of the O’Daimoku. Nichiren Dai’Shonin says in *Hokke Shoshin Jobutsu Sho*, “When I call on the Buddha-nature, ‘Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,’ within me, and when the Buddha-nature is called out of me and it appears, then it is called a Buddha.” When we wake up, our Buddha-nature is within us, and when it becomes one with the spirit of the Universal Buddha, we are Buddhas, too, at least while we are chanting the O’Daimoku.

Enjoy chanting throughout this happy year!

Erecting a Daimoku Monument

(LOTUS #51, March/April, 2003)

Nichiren Daishonin chanted “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,” the sacred title of the Lotus Sutra, for the first time on April 28, 1253 at Mount Kiyosumi, Japan. This year in 2003, it will be the 750th Anniversary of this event.

In order to commemorate this happy occasion, we will erect an approximately nine foot monument featuring the O’Daimoku at the southwest corner of the temple. At the two foot base of the monument, “Rissho Ankoku” in Japanese and “Peace and Security of the World by Establishing the True Dharma” in English will be engraved as well. This phrase is from Nichiren Shonin’s life, and it is the same for all his followers. The stone for the O’Daimoku is seven feet because of the seven characters in it. It is black with white engraving. This will enable people to read the words from their cars as they pass by the front of the temple. It will help them cultivate the seed of their Buddha nature, and as a result we sincerely wish peace and security around the world.

It was at the Dharma Exchange Meeting after a Sunday Service on May 19, 1996 that the congregation discussed how to celebrate the 750th Anniversary of the Birth of Nichiren Buddhism. A discussion was brought up regarding the collection of pocket change. Attendees could bring small change to the temple and place the coins into a jar at the incense offering desk at every service. \$72.93 was the first accumulated collection within a month.

The Pocket Change Donation accumulated a little over \$2,500.00 by September, 2001. The fund was still quite short of the goal of the estimated cost of \$10,000 for the monument and rearranging the southwest garden in front of the temple building. In order to build up more funds, we started to recycle aluminum cans in October, 2001. With the help of recycling, the fund added up to almost \$3, 400.00 in another year, but it is still quite short of the goal. Then the Fujinkai promised to donate \$5,000.00 for this project. Thus, the erecting the monument is approaching to reality.

The seven foot Indian Black stone was delivered to a monument company from India. It is now in the process of having the words engraved.

Under this monument, a box containing copies of the O’Daimoku will be buried in a vault as a time capsule. Many people have turned in their hand-written copies of the O’Daimoku and also entire the Lotus Sutra during the last few years. There is some room for more copies. You can still turn in your copied O’Daimoku by the 9th of March, 2003 with a small donation. We will have a special ceremony for placing your *shakyo* in the time cap-cell after the Sunday Service on March 9th. The concrete work of the foundation will start in the same week of March.

The dedication and eye opening ceremony is scheduled to be held on Sunday, April 27, 2003 at 10:00 a.m. in front of the temple building. Everyone is welcome.

Before the ceremony, the members and Dharma friends of the Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple will go up to the top of Mt. Wilson for the Sunrise Service to commemorate Nichiren Daishonin's first chanting of the O'Daimoku at Mt. Kiyosumi.

Seven Practices of the Sacred Title

(LOTUS #48, September/October, 2002)

There are seven practices for the O'Daimoku, the Sacred Title, of the Lotus Sutra. They are to read, listen, chant, study, explain, copy, and keep it. The O'Daimoku has seven characters, just as there are seven practices.

To chant and to write the O'Daimoku, "Na-Mu-Myo-Ho-Ren-Ge-Kyo," is very easy for people who were born and raised in Japan; however, it is hard for many Americans. They cannot pronounce the words correctly. For them, the practices of the O'Daimoku starts by listening to someone else chant it. By listening, they can more easily learn to read the letters correctly. If once they can pronounce it correctly three times, they can continue to chant it daily.

After practicing it in through these three ways (listening, reading and chanting), one may wonder why they feel better. They will then want to learn the meaning of the O'Daimoku, and then wish to tell others. By then, one has already practiced it in five different ways: reading, listening, chanting, studying, and explaining.

For those who have never learned how to write Japanese, it is hard to write the O'Daimoku in Japanese. However, even a child can trace the seven characters of the Sacred Title. One more practice is added to the above mentioned five practices.

When we chant the Lotus Sutra and O'Daimoku, we face the *Mandala Gohonzon*, or the most honorable one. The Sacred Title is written on the center of the *Gohonzon*. So we read it, chant it, listen to our own voices, learn about it, explain it to others, and copy it. To continue these practices is to keep the O'Daimoku. Thus, we practice the seven different ways of the Sacred Title.

Enjoy Chanting the O'Daimoku

(LOTUS #36, August/September, 2000)

A person asked me; "I am chanting O'Daimoku for many hours a day. Why don't I get some benefits from this effort?" The results of chanting may differ depending on one's mental stage at the time of the chanting. For beginners, I recommend, "You simply chant O'Daimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo." Nichiren Shu members, who have chanted it for a long time, must begin to think about the time, length, sitting position, and mental state while chanting. The following is my personal opinion, but I believe that the results of chanting is different depending on one's mental states such as the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth or Ninth Consciousness as explained in the following paragraph.

The Sixth Consciousness corresponds to the senses such as seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching, and thinking. We always discern these senses as good or bad, like or dislike, beneficial or harmful. Those people who chant in the stage of the Sixth Consciousness believe in material things and doubt the power of the O'Daimoku and the potentiality of themselves. Because they doubt the powers, there is no protection from spiritual beings or any progress within themselves. They also chant it with negative attitudes like thinking of the painful sitting position, worrying about the number of times to chant O'Daimoku or negative judgments of others.

The Seventh Consciousness corresponds to the subconscious. Our daily thought and actions have been recorded in our sub-conscious just like the black box of a commercial airplane. Doubts and negative attitudes are buried deep in the subconscious. We must purify the doubtful and negative subconscious. O'Daimoku in the Seventh Consciousness is to chant innocently in non-thought; avoiding judgments of good or bad, painful or pleasurable, and likes or dislikes. Then little by little our negative subconscious will be cleansed and purified.

There are special Buddhist terms in the Eighth and Ninth Consciousness, but I will translate them in my own way as I understand it. I say the seventh consciousness is the "Buried Consciousness." There are a lot of thoughts that have been buried deep in the subconscious not only from the time of our childhood, but also from many lives before. These are karma. If there is enough good karma buried, they will produce good effects by simply chanting O'Daimoku. However, if there is a lot of negative karma, we must then repent.

O'Daimoku in the Eighth Consciousness is to repent for wrong thoughts and actions that occurred in the past. "Repentance is the mysterious medicine that cures illness and the Secret Dharma to change one's fate," states the Prayers of Repentance. Therefore, O'Daimoku in the Eighth Consciousness brings us happiness.

The Ninth Consciousness is what Nichiren Shonin calls "The Capital City of Absolute Reality that is the Ninth Consciousness of the King of Mind." It is Buddha's mind within our bodies. The Buddhas never judges us! The Buddha's mind is Truth, Beauty, and Goodness. O'Daimoku in the Ninth Consciousness is to chant O'Daimoku, focusing on

the Buddha nature. In other words, when you chant, think: "I am going to be all right," "I am going to be better," "I can do it," "I am beautiful." This is positive chanting.

One easy way to chant the O'Daimoku in the Ninth Consciousness is to smile during chanting. Look up at the Gohonzon, so your eyes will look up slightly, this will make your face turn to a smile. Do not force yourself to chant O'Daimoku. If you force yourself, you simply build up negative subconscious aversion. Enjoy chanting the O'Daimoku.

When you continue to chant the O'Daimoku in the Ninth Consciousness, you will notice that you and your surroundings are changing for the better. With the merit of our chanting, let us pray for the happiness of all living beings.

DEITY DAIKOKU

(Jan. 28, 1996)

This morning, we had a special service called Festival of Deity Daikoku. We had the opening-eyes ceremony for new statues of Deity Daikoku and blessing the power of the deity. Daikoku-sama is very similar to Santa Clause. I would like to compare the two of them for your better understanding of the Deity Daikoku.

Daikoku-sama will bring you good fortune, wealth, prosperity, long life, and happiness. Santa Clause is coming only once on Christmas Day, while Daikoku-sama is coming six times in a year which is every 60 days. Today is the first appearance of Daikoku in this year. He carries a big bag on his back just like Santa Clause. Santa's bag is full of toys and other presents for children, but Daikoku's bag is full of money and food -- especially rice. When his bag becomes empty, he strikes his magic mallet with his right hand, then it is said that whatever his believers want, it will be materialized. Daikoku-sama is worshipped by adults especially merchants, store owners, and house-holders.

Because Daikoku-sama produces rice which is a main dish for Asian people, his statue is placed in a respectable place in the kitchen. Until many decades ago, food was cooked with fire of wood or coal that made a lot of black smoke.

Therefore Daikoku-sama becomes black with kitchen smoke compared with the red-coat of Santa Clause. Santa Clause is an old man just like Daikoku. The old man of Daikoku-sama promises long life for the worshippers. Santa has white hair, mustache, and beard, while Daikoku has no mustache nor beard. He wears flat hat not like a Santa's cone-shaped hat. His smiling face represents happiness, his short and round body means satisfaction and harmony. His feet rest on the top of two straw rice-bags which symbolizes his power to control rice and other grains.

A statue of Daikoku-sama is placed in a square wood rice measure. This is because Daikoku-sama represents the plus or a male while the measure represents a minus or a female. When plus and minus meet, something new will be produced.

This symbolizes harmony, happiness and new production. In our daily lives, we must always try to harmonize with spouse, members of the family, neighbors, and also with nature. Our mind and body must be harmonized, too; then we will keep good health and happiness. Please believe in this harmony, and chant the Odaimoku. Then, Odaimoku will produce rice, money, health, and long life for you. It is always the Odaimoku that is the important thing.



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