

# DHARMA ESSAY

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(*Chapter II*)

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## **DAILY LIFE**

### **We Are Buddha's Children**

(2004 *KOKORO NO KATE*, Los Angeles Buddhist Churches Federation)

*Warera wa Hotoke no Kodomo nari  
Ureshii Tokimo Kanashii Tokimo  
Mioya no Sode ni Sugari nan*

This is the first verse of a Buddhist *gatha* titled “Buddha’s Children.” We often sing this song during Sunday school services. I am fond of this verse because we are really Buddha’s children who were born from the Buddha’s mouth.

The temples of the Los Angeles Buddhist Church Federation hold various ceremonies or services for children in order to make “*E-N*” or relation with these children.

One of them is called “First *Omairi*.” It will be held around the fiftieth day after a baby’s birth. At that time the parents and grandparents dress up and come to the temple for blessing. The parents usually make an appointment with a minister of the temple before their visitation. Many temples will hold the special ceremony during the Hanamatsuri Service. For more detail I suggest you to call your temple.

Next is “*Shichi Go San*” or a festival for children of three, five and seven years of age. It is usually held around November 15. It is a traditional ceremony to mark the growth stages of the children aged three (girls and boys), five (boys) and seven (girls). Little children in these age groups are dressed up in their best clothes and taken to a temple by their parents. Some temples advertise the event in *The Rafu Shimpo* while others hold its rite on an individual basis.

Another major event for children is “*Chigo*.” It is the children who masquerade as a heavenly being at festivals of the dedication of an anniversary of the temple.

According to a Buddhist legend, Siddhartha Gautama was born from Queen Maya’s right armpit. According to the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha’s children were born from the Buddha’s mouth.

Siddhartha Gautama became a Buddha after six years of ascetic practices. It is said that the Buddha expounded 84,000 teachings to various people at various places for fifty years before his Great Nirvana. Some of the teachings are easily understood even by children, others need basic knowledge of Buddhism for people to understand, and the rest are too difficult for most people.

Buddhism is expounded all over the world these days. All Buddhists are Buddha's children who were born from his mouth. We follow the Dharma that was spoken from the Buddha's mouth.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that we are Buddha's children in three parables. I would like to introduce just one of them here.

Once upon a time, children took poison and were suffering a lot while their father (M.D.) was away from home. Returning home, the father (Buddha) made a remedy of good color, good fragrance and good taste and gave it to his children made sick by poison (us). The Buddha saved all children who took the remedy (Buddha Dharma).

Thus, the Buddha always watches us as his children to be free from sufferings.

## **Hatred Is Overcome by Compassion**

(2002 *KOKORO NO KATE*, Los Angeles Buddhist Churches Federation Hanamatsuri)

Sakyamuni Buddha says, “Hatred cannot be overcome by hatred. Hatred can only be overcome by compassion.”

There once was a war being waged during the time of the Buddha. Kapilavastu where the Sakya Clan lived was attacked and conquered by a neighboring country, Kosala.

Hatred was the original reason of the attack. King Pasenardi of Kosala wanted to marry a daughter of a royal family in the Kapilavastu Kingdom. Since the king of Kosala was richer and owned more land than the king of Kapilavastu, he ordered his wish to be fulfilled by the royal family of the Kapilavastu. The proud family of the Kapilavastu did not like the order and sent a daughter of a maidservant as his empress instead. A prince of Kosala was born by the empress but was despised by the people of his kingdom. The prince always cursed against the people of the Kapilavastu and vowed to revenge them.

When the prince took the throne of his country, he went to attack hateful Kapilavastu. There he saw Sakyamuni Buddha meditating at the border of the two countries. The king gave up the attack, but he could not control his emotion of hatred against the neighborhood country. So he tried to destroy the country again; however, the Buddha was again sitting at the roadside. He tried a third time and saw the Buddha at the same spot. When the king came to attack Kapilavastu the fourth time, the Buddha gave in, and the birth country of the Buddha was destroyed during the fourth try.

Although the motherland of Sakyamuni Buddha was destroyed, his teaching was propagated throughout India. Later, however, an Islam army invaded India in the thirteenth century, and they destroyed almost all Buddhist temples and statues. As the result, Buddhism disappeared from India. Buddhism in India today was brought back from different countries during the 20th century.

Buddhist teachings were also destroyed when the Chinese army invaded Tibet in 1959. Many Tibetans were brutalized by a systematically planned genocide. Many temples and volumes of sutras were destroyed. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and others escaped into exile to India.

Although many temples and volumes of sutras were burned and destroyed, the Dalai Lama is welcomed around the world today. He has given lectures on the Buddha Dharma at colleges, public halls, parks and many other places around the world.

War seems to be part of the history of human beings in the past and even today. However, as Buddhists, we must realize and practice the Buddha Dharma of non-violence and mutual existence. Non-violence does not mean to give up but to keep in mind the interests of others along with ours. It involves a sense of compassion and caring.

Six years ago, there was only one web site that practiced racial discrimination. Now, there are over 1,000 sites propagating racial disaffirmation according to L.A. Times. They are based on hatred. The peaceful harmonies around the world depend on all of us getting along with each other. The Los Angeles Nichiren Buddhist Temple has started Prayers for Peace since January 2001 commemorating the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Let us learn Buddha's compassion and practice it to overcome hatred. Everyone is welcome to the Peace Prayers at 7:30 p.m. on the Second Wednesday of each month.

## Observe One's Mind

(2001 *KOKORO NO KATE*, Los Angeles Buddhist Churches Federation)

Our thoughts wander about every moment of our lives. When we perform an intense activity, it is necessary to concentrate on the activity. However, our thoughts often wander. We think of other things, and it becomes hard to concentrate. Try to find out how many things you can think about in one minute.

Chihi-I (538-597), the founder of T'ien-T'ai Sect in China, says, "Three Thousand Realms Are Contained in One Thought." This means that all phenomena in this world are enclosed within one of our thoughts..

All human beings have the Ten States of Mind. We are sometimes upset, greedy, ignorant, harmful, calm, joyful, mindful, selfish, helpful, and compassionate. When we are listening to a reverend's sermon, our minds are very calm and compassionate, but once we step out of a temple, we can easily get mad at someone.

Our minds are free like the wind. We think of all kinds of things, from tiny bacteria to the vast universe in a matter of seconds. We can also think of our family or friends in an instant.

The ten realms start from the realm of hell at the bottom to the Buddha realm at the top. The people in the hell are criminals in and out of jails. Greedy people are in hungry worlds. People who behave like animals are in animal realm. Gangs are in *asura* world. Ordinary human beings are in the human realm. Nobles are in heavenly realms. Listeners to the Buddha's teachings are in *shomon* realm. Those seeking universal truth independently are in *engaku* realms. Those striving to attain Buddhahood are Bodhisattva realm and compassionate people are in Buddha realm.

In addition to the Ten States of Minds in the Ten Realms, Chihi-I sees an object in the factors, such as its form, nature, body, inner power, activities, primary cause, environment causes, effects, rewards, and totality of the aforementioned nine factors. These ten factors are called the Ten Suchness.

Chihi-I also sees all existences are interrelated within the Three Worlds: sentient beings like you and me, non-sentient beings like stones and metals, and a world of spiritual and intangible beings like air and gas.

When we multiply the above Ten States of Minds, the Ten Realms, the Ten Suchness, and the Three Worlds, it makes the Three Thousand Realms contained in one thought. In the Three Thousand Realms, everything exists while it influences each other from the tiny bacteria to the vast universe. For instance, many of us think we can control nature and animals, and that they are here only for our convenience. This thinking has led us to destroy precious nature. As a result, we are now concerned about warmer temperatures

and disasters caused by insolent human beings. We must realize that all phenomena in these worlds are the results of our thoughts.

Whether we think in the positive or negative, our thoughts will influence the Three Thousand Realms, and as a result, these realms will affect us, good or bad. Happiness and peace depend on our thoughts.

## **Eternity, Happiness, Freedom and Purity**

(LOTUS #7, November/December., 1996)

Eternity, happiness, freedom, and purity are everyone's wish.

We wish to live long if it is a happy life. If something is good, we wish to keep it long.

We wish to be happy always. Our life style should improve year by year. We want our children to live in a better situation than ourselves. Otherwise, it is regression rather than progress. Electric appliances allow us to have an easier life.

Freedom means not to be restricted by others. If one insists on having only his or her own freedom, fights will result between spouses, neighbors, and countries. If we can do anything we want, we are very happy.

Purity means a society which is free from fights, crimes, wars, and other evil actions.

St. Nichiren, the founder of the Nichiren Buddhism wished to establish the Buddha Land, the land of eternity, happiness, freedom, and purity not only after our death, but on this earth. According to him, chanting the O'Daimoku is the only way to establish this land of bliss. It must be done by all people of the world.

It is very difficult, but let us try to build the Buddha Land in our family and in our temple, then spread it to our nation and to the world.



## Creator

(LOTUS #40, May/June, 2001)

Sakyamuni Buddha did not talk about the creator of universe. He has said that all things appear and disappear by reasons of an endless series of causes and conditions. Therefore, birth and death are not God's will but are caused by conditions.

If Buddhism denies the creator, why did Nichiren Dai'Shonin write Dai Bonten and Tensho Daijin on his *Mandala Gohonzon*?

Dai Bonten (Brahmadeva in Sanskrit) is a god who is the creator of the universe in Brahmanism, an ancient Hindu religion. Dai Bonten or Brahman Heavenly-King who was the lord of the Saha World (the earth) was present at the assembly in Chapter One of the Lotus Sutra together with other gods, human beings, and non-human beings. Nichiren Shonin accepted Brahman Heavenly-King and Taishaku-ten as representatives of the Hindu Gods. Taishaku-ten is a god who watches moral behavior of human beings.

Tensho Daijin (Amaterasu Omikami) is a goddess and a daughter of Izanagi and Izanami who created Japan and the original ancestor of Japanese emperors. According to Nihon Shoki and Kojiki, Japanese epics, Izanagi and Izanami have created the islands of Japan by dipping a jeweled spear into the sea as they stood on the Floating Bridge of Heaven. Nichiren adored Tensho Daijin together with Hachiman Daibosatsu, the Great Bodhisattva Hachiman. Commonly known, he is the god of war and a guardian of *samurai* warriors. Nichiren considered Tensho Daijin and Hachiman Daibosatsu as the protectors of practitioners of the Lotus Sutra.

At the time of Kamakura Era, Christianity was not yet introduced in Japan. I personally think that if Nichiren Dai'Shonin knew Christianity he might add Jesus Christ or the God in the *Mandala Gohonzon*.

Thus, Nichiren Shonin accepted gods in other religions as protectors of the Lotus Sutra even though the gods are creators. It is because Chapter 14 of the Lotus Sutra says; "The gods in the heaven will always serve him (a preacher of the Lotus Sutra) in order to hear the Dharma from him. The gods will protect him day and night for the sake of the Dharma so that the hearer may rejoice because this sutra was, is, and will be protected by the supernatural powers of the past, present and future Buddhas."

The Lotus Sutra is the treasury of the hidden core of the Buddhas, gods and Creators.

## Heaven and Hell

(LOTUS #16, May/June, 1997)

"Please explain about heaven and hell," I was asked when I visited one of the temple members. Her son who became a Christian recently asked her, "I want to watch the movie 'Heaven and Hell' at my church, but I have to take someone else with me. "Mother, could you go with me?" her son asked. Thinking about her son, the mother went to see the movie with him. On the way back he asked his mother to convert to Christianity. She answered, "Let me think about it for awhile." She later asked me about the matter.

"You do not need to go to the Christian heaven. Since you are a Buddhist, you will go to the Buddha Land. Do not worry!" I said. "Suppose the Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed gathered in a room. Would they debate about heaven, Buddha Land or hell? I do not think so. They would probably discuss how to bring about world peace and how to solve such problems as racial relations and other sufferings among the people of the world."

The following parable should further clarify my discussion: "Many people are ready to eat. Those who have the minds of Buddha sat across the table facing each other, then held the food with the long chopsticks to bring the food to the other person's mouth. One, who has the mind of hell, thinks and acts just for oneself. On the other hand, one who has the mind of Buddha, thinks and acts for others first.

Even under the same conditions and environment, people would consider a place to be heaven or hell depending on how it affects them personally. The purple flowers of the Jacaranda will bloom soon in Southern California. Looking at the flowers, some people might read a poem, sing a song, take a photograph or draw a picture. Other who must sweep the ground may complain about the flowers.

Heaven, Buddha Land, or Hell is not the place you go due to the judgment of God or Buddha. You determine in your own mind if a condition or a place is such that you are in either heaven or hell. To create the Buddha Land on this earth is following the teaching of Nichiren Dai'Shonin and the Lotus Sutra.

## **Take the Proper Amount of Food**

(Feb. 16, 1987)

Many people have a problem with being overweight.

There are many people whose blouses and pants are so tight and look as though they might rip at anytime. Newspapers, T.V., and magazines advertise weight-loss program. Stores sell non-fat milk, diet soda, and other sugar-less food.

Being over-weight has been a problem for many centuries. Even a Buddhist scripture admonishes heavy eaters. One day, King Pasenadee called on the Buddha. The King had shortness of breath. When the Buddha asked the reason, the King answered that he had a bad habit of over-eating. He had just finished a big meal, and his stomach was too full.

The Buddha watched the King's belly with a smile and stated the phrase:

"One should take care of their body, should know the amount of food for it, and should eat properly. Then one will suffer less, get old more slowly, and will live longer." The King was glad to hear this, and he ordered his attendant to memorize the phrase and chant it at the King's every meal.

My father used to say, "Eating eight-tenths full of your stomach is the best for the body." But for growing children, the old saying was not very appreciated.

Many overweight people say, "Even if I drink water, I gain weight." It may be so. However, if one drinks water only, without any food, how can he or she gain weight? They eat ice cream, a piece of cake, or some other goodies even though their stomachs are really full. They say, "It goes into a different part of the stomach." If they do this often, they will suffer from being overweight.

Depending on one's work, age, and body, the amount of food for each person should be different. The Buddha's word, "Know the proper amount of food and eat properly," is for everyone who wishes to live more healthily and longer.

## **Two Thousand Ancestors**

(September 16, 1986)

In the summer of 1986, I visited Japan, and with the help of my father traced my ancestors back three generations. Because my infant name was partially borrowed from my great grandfather's, and I also gave names borrowed from my grandfather to my three children, I wanted to trace my ancestry.

Some people take their parents' or grand-parents' names, while others inherit money and estates of their ancestors. Heredity is not only names, money, and estates, but also character, habits, constitution of body, intelligence, and many other things.

Have you ever wondered how many ancestors you have? EVERY person in this world has two parents, four grand parents, eight great grand parents, sixteen great grand parents, and it keeps going back. In every generation, you multiply by two. Two becomes four, which make eight, which get sixteen, 32, 64, and so on until 1024. So when you add all of them, from your parents to 10 generations ancestors back, in ten generations, the number of your ancestors becomes over 2,000 people. That is, over 2,000 people were directly connected to you in order for you to be born in this world. Without any one of them, you would never have existed in this world.

You are not merely born by your parents' love affair only, but also at least over two thousand ancestors are directly or indirectly involved in your character, habits, your body, and inheritance of money and states.

Therefore, Buddhists hold many memorial services for their ancestors again and again and show their appreciation to their ancestors. Remember, each one of us has over 2,000 ancestors in the last ten generations.

## Unaccepted Gift

(April 16, 1987)

One day the Sakyamuni Buddha visited a village to deliver His teachings. A foolish man approached the Buddha and started to slander Him with the filthiest words.

The Buddha waited quietly until the foolish man finished the disgusting talk and then asked politely, "Son, have you ever given a gift to someone?" "Certainly, many times I did," replied the man. "If a person refused to accept your present, to whom would it belong?"

The abuser replied, "In that case, it would belong to me who offered it." Then the Buddha continued, "My son, you have for me a gift of curse words, but I accept nothing and request that you to keep it to yourself."

An abuser is like a man who looks up and spits in the sky. The spittle does not soil the heaven but eventually it comes back and defiles him or her. We often get upset when someone speaks ill of us. That is because we accept his or her bad words toward us. If we could stand still without accepting the foolish words, the words would return to the abuser.

Although the Sakyamuni Buddha was a great teacher, there were many people who disliked Him. They were the people whose spouse, children, or even parents denounced their material lives and ordained as monks or nuns. In these cases, the Buddha accepted the words of abuse. Even though He was spoken ill of or even beaten with sticks, and rocks were thrown at Him, He was very patient. He did not run away from these persecutions. He always told his disciples to be patient for seven days. Only for seven days, people would speak ill of them, if the disciples endured quietly for a week, the abusers would get tired of their wrong doing.

In our daily life, we Buddhists should try to be patient even though we are slandered. Do not accept the wrong gift. Be patient for seven days.

## Various Viewpoints

(May 16, 1987)

St. Nichiren says, "Just as a picture of a devil has no meaning, but it is frightening, a picture of a beautiful woman may not capture a man, but a jealous wife will view it with jealousy." It means that the fearful thought of the devil in our mind will make us view a picture of a devil with fear. Also, a wife who is very jealous of her husband will become very envious when she sees a picture of a beautiful woman.

Depending upon one's thought and point of view, a person could become a Buddha or a devil. In many cases, we misjudge others and say, "He or she is bad." It is often because we judge him or her from our own one-sided thinking.

Nichiren Shonin appreciated others even though they spoke ill of him, because he learned important lessons from those who persecuted him. He said, "Without them I would not have become a saint to preach the Lotus Sutra in the Era of the Latter Law." In this way, we learn to love, trust, and appreciate others even though they speak ill of us.

A poet writes his view of watching falling leaves. A young couple will think of love when leaves are falling, while a farmer will think of how good the fallen leaves are for fertilizer, while a sick person will see a falling leaf and think of his or her approach to death. Then, a Buddhist saint will realize the law of uncertainty watching the leaves falling. A busy person will not notice the leaves at all.

To view a statue of the Buddha, one who believes it is an idol will not place their hands together in front of the statue. However, those who have faith and believe the statue as the sacred will be able to accept with warmth and sensitivity. Many temples and shrines in Japan give amulets to their worshippers. These are of no value if it is thought of only as a piece of paper, wood, or copper. If we believe in the power of the Buddha's blessing on the amulet, it gives us the power to live in the hardship of life.

## **Worshipping the Moon**

(July 16, 1987)

More than 700 years ago, St. Nichiren wrote a letter to a woman. "If you feel dear to see me, worship the sun and the moon. My reflections are in the sun and in the moon."

This woman was Lady Koh from Sado Island. She and her husband became St. Nichiren's followers while Nichiren was exiled on Sado Island. Later, Nichiren Shonin was pardoned from the Kamakura military government, and then retired to Mt. Minobu, hundreds of miles away.

Today, if we want to talk to someone, we just pick up a telephone. If we want to send something to someone, we just mail it. If we want to see someone, we can travel by car, train, bus, or airplane. However, these things did not exist over 700 years ago. There were no photographs either. However, love of or being dear to someone was no different from it is today. Lady Koh wished to see St. Nichiren, but she could not, because she lived hundreds of miles away. Therefore, Nichiren Shonin wrote that she could worship the sun and the moon. The sun and the moon reflect the image of him.

Even when two people are in different locations, they can see the sun and the moon. So they can see the reflection of loved ones far away, if they can imagine it so. While the sun is too bright to look at, the moon is less bright and more romantic to see. However, for those who live in big cities, they hardly see the moon because of the bright city lights and all the building in the way.

I often enjoy seeing the moon when I travel out of town by myself. It is one of the best times for me to worship the moon. There is no distraction of buildings or noises of the city. I can imagine various things on the face of the moon. I naturally chant the Odaimoku, "Namu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo."

## **Mother has only "EN" to Bare her Child**

(October 16, 1986)

In Japan, marriages have often been arranged by parents through a "go-between." This is especially true for one who cannot find his or her spouse by themselves. At first, a "go-between" takes a portrait of the man to the woman and the woman to the man. When a prospective match has been recommended, both parties meet each other for the first time formally to find out whether they get along or not. This is called "*miai*."

One day, a marriageable man wanted to marry. So a "go-between" took his pictures to several ladies. These ladies all refused the first meeting with him after seeing his photograph.

At last, without showing a picture of him, one "*miai*" was arranged.

He was very excited to have the first meeting with the woman. However, when she saw the man's face, she immediately refused to meet him again.

The young man was so upset, he hit his mother in her face, and shouted, "How did you bear me with such an ugly face?" The mother was speechless. She had no way to explain the reason this lovely son was born with a big scar on his face. Seeking a solution, she came to a Nichiren temple. The priest of the temple told her to bring her son the next day.

The following day, as soon as the young man bowed to the priest, the minister slapped the man's face with his hand and said, "You hit your mother like this, didn't you? I heard you blamed your mother that you were born with an ugly face. Who in the world would believe that a mother would wish for a child with an ugly face? The mothers are not the creators of the children. Your mother was just given an opportunity to bear you. It is called "En." Your ugly face was not caused by her, but your karma from your previous lives caused your ugly face. You must repent your bad karma and appreciate your mother who gave you birth. You should put your hands together in Gassho and respect your mother and others."

The son apologized to his mother right away. He changed his attitude toward his family and others. Years later, he was able to marry.

We should never think that our mothers made our faces and features. We are responsible for our faces and features. Each individual's unique past partially determines his or her face and features to form his or her destiny.



## How to Shine your Mind

Over twenty years ago, my family and I went to Mirror Lake, Utah. It is located on the border line of Utah and Wyoming. The elevation is over 7,500 feet above sea level. The surfaces of the lake look just like a mirror. It reflected snow-covered mountains, clear blue sky, and clouds like cotton here and there. The landscape is very impressive to me even today.

A clear mirror reflects everything, as it is. It reflects an angry face, a smiling face, crying face, a happy face and etc. A face reflects one's inner self. Therefore, it is said that a face is a mirror of one's mind. However, when a mirror is dusty, it does not reflect clearly.

St. Nichiren said that our delusive minds are like dusty mirrors. When you shine your minds, they will surely become like a clear mirror reflecting the truth of all phenomena. How should you shine the mind? The answer is just to chant the Odaimoku, "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo."

One day, a feminist lady came to me for counseling. She said, "I had many chances to get married. But every time when I was just about to marry, my fiancé canceled the marriage. What was wrong with me?"

Since I know a method how to see one's future by chanting the Odaimoku, I promised to give her advice. Returning to my temple, I chanted the Odaimoku and asked if there would be a chance for her to get married within the next two years or not. As the result, there would be no chance at all even after the two years.

I told her exactly what I saw. She was very sad. Then, my inner self asked her with my voice, "You must have vowed that you would never get married, didn't you?" Her reply was "Yes." She started crying and told me that when she was young, her father abused her sexually. At that time, she vowed not to get married."

My advice for her was that she should cancel the vow to whatever god or anybody she had vowed. Then, I gave her a Gohonzon, an object of worship in Nichiren Buddhism. I said to her, "Place this Gohonzon in a respectable place. And chant 'Namu Myoho Renge Kyo' everyday and pray for a marriage to a nice man who fits her life style."

One year had passed since then. She called me to conduct a marriage at a community hall. Of course it was for her and her future husband. I married them according to the Nichiren Buddhist rite.

She mentioned how she met her husband. One day, she missed a bus to go to work. She waited for the next bus. There, a man came to the bus stop where she was waiting. Naturally they exchanged greetings. Then they found that they had many similarities; single, vegetarian, about the same age and so on.

That is what St Nichiren said, that to shine your mind by chanting the Odaimoku, then your mind become clear. Your clear mind reflects the truth in the past, present, and future.

This morning, we are gathered here to chant the Odaimoku. Our dusty mirror must be cleared a little bit. But when you step out of the temple, your mind may get dusty soon again, because you stop the chanting. Your mind may become full of delusion. To avoid that, please keep chanting while you walk, drive a car, or whatever you are doing. Then your mind will be shining little by little, and eventually it will be clear like a shined mirror reflecting the cause and effect of what you do.

## Understanding Others' Problems and Concerns

(2001)

I am very glad that we are entering the 21st Century instead of the Nostradamus' Prediction of the end of the world.

Last year (the end of the 20th Century) there was a large number of sad events such as shootings by students at campuses which killed several teachers and students, setting fires on church buildings and the killing of innocent people involving hate crimes, mothers killing their own children, disgraceful conduct by the police and many other sad crimes.

Thinking of these occurrences, a person who was educated in Japan before the war insists that we should bring back *shushin*. This requires that the teachers force ethics on their students. These ethics are based on the Emperor's status as a god. Eventually these types of education and beliefs lead in reducing the freedoms of religion and speech and also lead to militarism. Some Americas tried to teach "The Ten Commandments" at public schools, but it is against the separation of state and religion as required by the Constitution of the United States.

When we talk about morals in America, it leads to the Christian commandments. "Not to steal, not to tell a lie, not to commit adultery, not to kill" are moral. These morals apply to everyone regardless of faith and race.

The root of morality is not to cause trouble and sadness in other people. People today in the East and the West have become too selfish and materialistic. They enjoy themselves at the expense of others. If someone tries to interfere with their happiness, they may even kill that person with no regard for the value of life.

We should be concerned with how our conduct affects others. We must know how to control our desires so as to not cause problems for others. We must educate our children as well as adults on how to control their desires at home, school, and church. It is quite all right for one to be happy doing what he likes, but if his conduct adversely affects others, then he should change the way in which he conducts himself.

When we are able to realize other's sadness or troubles, we will then realize the true nature of the Buddha and will be able to cultivate that nature.

When we realize that what we are doing will make others happy and prosperous, we will then also feel happy.

In this new century, let us strive to understand the sadness and troubles of others.

# Wedding Ceremony in America

(NBIC “Bridge” No. 41, Autumn, 2003)

The wedding ceremony is one of the most important events in our life. However, the numbers of couples who remain married are decreasing every year both here in America and in Japan. Fifty years ago, twelve out of every 1,000 people in the U.S. were married, but it is now eight out of every 1,000 people. According to the 1975 census in Japan, 95 percent of the population over 40 years old were married, but it is 70 percent now.

Nevertheless, it is said that the number of wedding ceremonies have increased since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks due to people feeling the anxiety of being alone. I myself have personally conducted three wedding ceremonies in the past year.

The wedding ceremony conducted in a Nichiren Shu temple where the Mandala Gohonzon is enshrined is very formal. Ceremonies outside of the temple are more popular in America these days. They are held in various places, such as the banquet room of a hotel, a private wedding house, the beach, or in a garden to name a few locations.

Chapter 21 of the Lotus Sutra says, “Be it in a garden, in a forest, under a tree, in a monastery, or in the wilderness, there should be a *stupa* erected and offerings be made to it, as we know the place where the *stupa* is erected is the place of enlightenment. Here the Buddhas attained *Anuttara-samyaku-sambodhi* or Enlightenment. Here the Buddhas turned the wheel of the Dharma. Here the Buddhas entered into *Pari-Nirvana*.”

Therefore, when I perform a wedding, I take an altar set, such as the *Gohonzon*, a candle, its stand, an incense burner, and a flower vase to wherever the ceremony is held.

The music played at a wedding may be the traditional wedding march in the western style, *gagaku* (traditional Japanese noble music), Hawaiian songs, or other music based upon the couple’s taste. The most important matter is for the couple to make their marriage vow in front of the Nichiren Shu *Mandala Gohonzon* which is the symbol of universal harmony.

The order of the ceremony may differ depending on the officiant, so I will not describe it here. The traditional ring exchange is of course held. Besides the ring exchange, there will be a presentation of ‘*juzu*’ rosary from the officiant, incense offering, recitation of the Lotus Sutra, chanting the O’Daimoku, “*Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*” in unison and the traditional Japanese ‘*san, san, kudo.*’ This is the ceremony in which three sips of *sake* are taken with three different size *sake* cups between the couple. “Three” is an indivisible and lucky number. So the nine sips taken from the *sake* cups symbolize triple happiness. It is a wish and prayer for the newly wed couple not to be separated.

After years of marriage, many couples insist on their own selfish ego. They may grieve, “Married life is inconvenient! I cannot do what I want to do!” However, an ideal marriage is one where you change your inconvenience to feel happiness no matter what

your spouse does. Make your spouse's dream your own dream. Then you can help each other. Marriage is a part of Buddhist practice.

Chapter 2 of the Lotus Sutra says, "*Ekka Shu Shin*" which means "The Buddha makes living beings delighted." Chapter 16 of the same sutra says, "*In Go Shin Ren Bo*" which means "Because you fall in love (to the Buddhas)." Buddhas are not outside of you or your spouse but are within.

Married life is a wonderful way to practice the teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

## The Middle Way

(LOTUS #25, November/December, 1998)

December 8th is Bodhi Day, the day that Prince Siddhartha Gautama of Kapilavastu Palace attained enlightenment and became a Buddha.

Seeking salvation from the sufferings of birth, disease, old age and death, the prince gave up his luxurious life in the castle and commenced the homeless life of a monk. Even though he carried out ascetic practices and tortured himself for six years, he underwent great suffering of pain from these practices, the suffering of an empty stomach and thirst. There seemed to be no real salvation through these ascetic practices. So he gave up these practices and cleansed his body in a nearby river. He then sat under a bodhi tree for one day and night. When the morning star appeared in the eastern sky on December 8th, he attained enlightenment. He became the sage of the Sakya Clan, and was therefore referred to as Sakyamuni Buddha.

The means he took for the achievement of enlightenment was neither a luxurious life nor a torturing one, but one based on the Middle Way (not exceeding one way or another).

The Middle Way is one of the fundamental teachings in Buddhism. When you play a stringed instrument, you must neither pull the strings too loose nor too tight. The strength to properly pull the strings in just the right tension is what is called the Middle Way.

The weather changes throughout the year, marked by cold in the winter, heat in summer and just right temperatures in the spring and autumn. During the season of the equinoxes, Japanese Buddhists practice *O'Higan* memorial services for their ancestors to rest in peace. This is a practice of the Middle Way to cross a river to reach the other shore or the Buddha Land.

However it is true that summer is hot, winter is cold, and spring and fall are comfortable. During our long lives, there is a time when we must study or work hard, even cutting sleeping hours and omitting meals. There is also a time; however, when we must take rest and relaxation to avoid sickness and mishap.

I think that Sidhartha's luxurious life in the palace and ascetic practices in the forest were not in vain for the seeking of Enlightenment.

Thus, we must avoid extremes in one way or another, but we must also avoid attachment to the Middle Way. In order for us to be reminded of this, we recite the Ten *Nyoze* three times in the Hoben Pon, Chapter Two of the Lotus Sutra.

## Practices as the Sutra Revealed

(LOTUS #26, January/February, 1999)

A person who recently began his faith in the Lotus Sutra asked me, “What is the best way for me to practice Buddhism?”

The Lotus Sutra describes *Nyosetsu Shugyo*, or Buddhist practice as embracing, maintaining faith, reading, memorizing, copying, understanding the meaning of the Lotus Sutra, and spreading the teachings. One should reach out to others and teach the Lotus Sutra to them, encouraging them to listen to the sutra’s doctrines. This is what is meant as observing Buddhist practice.

In Japan, the period between January 6th and February 3rd is called “Wintry Practice.” It is a time in which people who observe religious faith or study the martial arts, intentionally practice outside in the cold, building up both their minds and bodies.

People always seek out an environment where one can feel comfortable. As a result, civilization has developed into what it is today. Conversely; however, laziness will result from overly satisfying surroundings. In the development of martial art skills or the refinement of one’s character, laziness is something that is absolutely prohibited. Naturally, it is always better to leisurely spend a cold winter in the comfort of a warm room. However, in such an overly satisfying environment, people may not seek improvement.

In Nichiren Shu, numerous priests and lay believers alike will march around their respective neighborhoods beating the hand-held drums and chanting O’Daimoku aloud during the cold season. They walk about sowing the seeds of the O’Daimoku of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo in people’s minds. At times people will yell at them, “Quiet! You’re making too much racket!” At other times, others will come up to them handing them monetary or other offerings while encouraging them by saying, “Keep up the good work!”

The twentieth chapter of the Lotus Sutra states that people should never cease from carrying out their Buddhist practice. In this chapter it relates the story of Bodhisattva Never-Despising, who whether the skies were clear or cloudy, would simply hold his hands in respectful prayer to all he would see or meet, saying, “I deeply respect you. This is because you are the person who will someday become a Buddha.” Revering others is also a form of Buddhist practice.

Nichiren Dai’Shonin stated, “Even if you do not always maintain the Buddhist precepts, it is alright just as long as you chant the O’Daimoku.” If we embrace sincere faith in the O’Daimoku, we will naturally begin to support and preserve the precepts and regulations of Buddhism. This is Buddhist practice. As Buddhist practice is strengthened, our hearts will not be swayed, even if people criticize us or complain to us. Furthermore, if we continue to embrace this sort of faith, then little by little without realizing it, we will

develop Buddha Wisdom within our own lives.

In Nichiren Shu, we do not specifically say you must do this or that, or not do this or that. Please carry out your own Buddhist practice to the best of your ability and in accordance with your own personal circumstances. In carrying out and maintaining this sort of sincere Buddhist practice, people can receive a great treasure. They will develop the wisdom of the Buddha within their own lives, before they even are aware of it.

We should all remain aware that Nichiren Dai'Shonin has one great desire or goal for all of us, that is "To get all the people of the world to chant the O'Daimoku, achieve a tranquil society, and world peace through the power of the Lotus Sutra." This is something we should all never forget.

Let us all try our best throughout this year to practice Buddhism as the Buddha taught us, not only for ourselves, but also for others.



## **Let Us Respect Others!**

(LOTUS #27, March/April, 1999)

It was thirty-five years ago (1964) when I first came to America. I was surprised to see many strangers greeting me saying "Hello!" or "Hi!" When we go to other countries, we still see people saying "Hi!" to strangers. This reminds me of a parable in the Lotus Sutra.

Once upon a time, there lived a man who would meet people; he would bow to them in veneration, saying, "I deeply respect you. I do not despise you, because someday you will practice the Way of the Bodhisattva and become Buddhas!"

This man never read the sutras or recited them. He just went up to people, bowed before them respectfully even though they became angry and insulted him. For this reason he was called "Never-Despising Bodhisattva."

He spent all his life bowing respectfully to everyone he met, praising them, and giving them his message of good will. When he was about to pass away, he heard a voice reciting the words of the Lotus Sutra. He took these words to heart and was able to purify his six senses (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mind). Once he purified his six senses, he was able to extend his life for many years, and was able to teach the Lotus Sutra to others. In this way, he led many people to supreme enlightenment, at which time he became a Buddha.

As a matter of fact, Sakyamuni Buddha said that Never-Despising Bodhisattva of that time was himself, Sakyamuni Buddha in his previous life.

To bow to others means to respect their Buddha nature. Buddha nature means that everyone has the potentiality to become a Buddha. In daily life, it is best to respect others and to praise their good points instead of criticizing them. Let us always respect others regardless of race, sex, education, faith, or background.

## Do Something Good for Others

(LOTUS #20, January/February, 1998)

Happy New Year! I am praying for the happiness and good health of all the members and our temple friends throughout the year.

Some people have stated to me, "I chanted the O'Daimoku very hard, but my prayers are not answered recently. Why is that?" Have you ever thought about that?

St. Nichiren says, "No prayer of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra remains unanswered." This quotation is a phrase from a letter to Sairen-Bo, one of Nichiren's disciples. We are not practitioners like Nichiren Dai'Shonin or Sairen-Bo, so some of prayers may not be answered. However he also says in the same letter, "Heavenly beings will surely protect those who keep the precepts and perform good deeds." Let us practice what he says.

In the Nichiren Shu Sect, "To keep the precepts means to chant O'Daimoku." If you chant O'Daimoku and do good deeds, then your prayers will be answered.

Those who blame the Gohonzon, "My prayer has not been answered," may have a lot of bad karma. I also think that they chant the O'Daimoku but they are always asking, "Give me this! Give me that!" Those who always ask selfishly are in the realm of babies' or toddlers' faith. At the beginning these prayers might be answered, but they do not last for long.

Babies and toddlers cry when they want something. They may want milk, a toy, or a hug. This stage is called 'requesting love.' The chanting in this stage is verbalizing the O'Daimoku in the same way that toddlers cry. In this stage of faith, one always asks, "Give me this!" or "Give me that!"

When they grow up, their love will be "Love of giving and taking." "I love you, so you love me." This is a 'love of exchange.' In this faith, one says, "I chanted O'Daimoku so many minutes or hours," or "I attended the service so often," or "I helped at the temple so many hours," so please answer my prayers." In this form or style of faith, one practices O'Daimoku with one's body and mouth. His or her prayers may be answered with things that are more valuable to youth or adults, than milk or toys are to toddlers. One must realize there is always a limit in material benefit. Faith in Nichiren Shu is to attain Buddhahood rather than seeking material gain.

I do not yet have a grandchild, so I do not know for sure. It is said that grandchildren are very cute. Grandparents easily give whatever their grandchildren request without expecting any reward in return. This is a 'love without requesting reward.' Chanting O'Daimoku should be with mouth, body, and heart. In other words, vocally chanting the O'Daimoku, while doing good deeds with sincerity, will lead to one's prayers being answered.

By the way, don't you think this society is unfair; "The poor are always poor, while the rich are become richer." It is an unwritten law of giving and receiving. The poor are always thinking about receiving. The rich use their wealth wisely and give or circulate the money. Eventually, this conduct will produce more wealth. This is the law of giving and receiving.

Throughout this year, please try to do something good for others even if it is the conduct of giving and taking. If it is possible, try to do something good without requesting reward, then your wish will be answered even if you do not specifically pray for it.

Let us practice chanting the O'Daimoku and do good for others. The deities will protect you even if you do not so request it.

## Selfish Prayers

Once upon a time, a statue of the Kannon Deity was enshrined in a small hut. A group of mice came to pray for help in defeating their enemy. A while later, a frog came out in front of the mice and said, "Those were very serious prayers. What happened to you?"

A leader of the mice explained, "The house we have lived in is owned by a very old family of this district. From generation to generation, all of the owners of the house have not liked cats at all. Therefore, without a problem, we went on very well from ancestors to descendants. However, recently the head of the house brought a cat into the home. This hateful enemy killed my wife. All of us are in deep sorrow. We are helpless before the cat, so we have appealed to the mighty Kannon Deity to chase away our constitutional enemy.

The frog said, "Do you think that your most dreadful enemy is the cat?"  
"Yes, that is right, that cat," answered the mice.

The frog laughed and said, "You think the cat is the most dreadful enemy, don't you. But actually, your sharp teeth are the most dreadful enemy of yours. Instead of praying to the Kannon, you had better pull your sharp teeth out."

The leader of the mice was very upset and said, "Because of these sharp teeth, we can cut and chew hard walls and boards. God created the teeth for us. The teeth are our treasures. How could we pull them out?"

The frog explained, "Before you get too upset with me, think about the reason why the owner of the house keeps the cat, the animal that he does not like at all. You caused him to bring the cat in the house. If you had limited your food to the thrown out garbage, the owner would never bring the cat in. However, you selfishly chewed up walls, chests, rice bags, food containers, and many other things, then ate the food of the people of the house. Not only that, you ran all over the house and made too much noise. Now, even the generous master of the house has to keep a cat. That is why your teeth originally caused the killing of your loved ones and relatives."

The mice of this parable are us, human beings. We easily forget the cause or causes we have planted ourselves and then selfishly pray to a god or a deity for deliverance.

## Practice

(April 3, 2005)

Last week, I had an interview with a professor regarding propagation of Buddhism in America, where Christianity is based on American history, culture, and life-style. He said that Christianity emphasizes on belief while Buddhism stresses on practice. He said that if you do too much interpretation of the Buddhist scriptures and do not practice the Buddha teachings, Buddhism will die in America. Buddhists must practice daily. To practice is the strength of Buddhism in America.

Nichiren Dai'Shonin says in *Shoho Jisso Sho*, "Have faith in the Mandala Gohonzon. ... Learn and practice to strengthen your faith! Without learning and practicing, there is no Buddhism." I wonder how many of you chant daily in front of the Gohonzon. Nichiren Buddhists must have a Gohonzon at your home. If you do not have it, please ask me. I have different sizes of the Gohonzon in scroll type and board type.

I believe all of you chant the O'Daimoku everyday. Many of you recite Chapter 2, *Hoben Pon*, and Chapter 16, *Jigage*, and chant the O'Daimoku daily, but I also recommend reciting other chapters of the Lotus Sutra when you have extra time. It is very important to chant vocally, not silently. When you chant the O'Daimoku and the sutra vocally, many parts of your brain are activated. When you read other chapters of the sutra, parts of your brain will also work harder. Then you can prevent Alzheimer's, according to a recent research on the brain. If you think that you will become forgetful, please try to read many chapters of the sutra and chant "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" vocally to activate your brain, so you will not become affected with Alzheimer's.

Chanting is one of the five major practices in Buddhism. The four other practices are memorizing, understanding, copying, and expounding. When you chant the same chapter everyday, you will be able to memorize a word, a phrase, and then the whole chapter. When you have time, please try to copy the sutra chapter to chapter by hand if possible. When you copy it by hand, more parts of your brain will work, so these practices will prevent your forgetfulness. It is still all right to type on a computer, because hands, eyes, ears, and your mind are activated. In carrying out and maintaining this sort of sincere practices, you can receive great benefits. You will develop the wisdom of the Buddha within your own lives. These practices of reciting, memorizing, understanding, and coping are beneficial for you.

However, when you explain a word or a phrase of Buddhist scripture to others, it will be beneficial not only for you but also for them. Expounding is the practice of a Bodhisattva. Nichiren Dai'Shonin continues to say in the same letter, "To learn and to practice are a part of faith. Even if it is only a word or a phrase, spread it to others."

Sharon Foreman who lives in San Clemente came to me last Thursday and asked my advice on giving a talk on Hanamatsuri in her six year old son's class. It is Easter in the Christian world, but her son's teacher asked her to share a Buddhist festival in class during the time of Easter.

To explain Buddhism, is the most important practice, so that Buddhism can spread in America and around the world.

## **There Is A River.**

(March 20, 2005)

30 years ago, I read a book called, “There Is A River.” I kept it for many years but lost it on an airplane while traveling. It was a very nice book. It is about life after death. A professor interviewed a lot of people around the world who experienced a phenomenon after their death, but somehow they came back to life again.

The river in this book symbolizes the divider between this world and the realm of death. All the people who came back from the other world experienced some sort of divider like a river, a tunnel, a fence, or a wall. Everyone who came back from the realm of the death had not completely crossed the dividers.

Today we hold the Spring *Higan* Memorial Services for all the dead. As you know, *Higan* means the other shore, that is the Buddha Land in Buddhism, while *shigan* means this shore, the land of suffering as we experience it everyday. Buddhists think that there is a river between this world of suffering and the world after our death. To reach the other shore (*Higan*) does not mean death in Buddhism, rather it means Enlightenment. To cross the river to the other shore means to have become enlightened or to attain Buddhahood.

Nichiren Shonin emphasized to attain Buddhahood while we are alive, not after we die. He says in *Issho Jobutsu Sho*, “Since the people’s minds are contaminated, the land is contaminated, too. If their minds are pure, the land is also pure. There is no difference between the lands. The pure land or the contaminated land depends on our good or bad minds. It can be said that we are ordinary people or Buddhas. When our minds are not settled, we are called ordinary people but when we become enlightened, we are called Buddhas. For example, when we shine a dirty mirror, it looks like a jewel. Our unsettled minds are just like the dirty mirror. When we shine the mirror, it surely reflects the universal truth. Have strong faith and shine your mind! How to shine your minds? Just chant the O’Daimoku, ‘Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.’ To chant the O’Daimoku is to shine your minds.”

Please look at a clean mirror and chant “NAMU MYOHO RENGE KYO,” and you will see yourself as a Buddha.



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