

No. 10 (July 1, 2009)

## SACRED WORDS

**I, Nichiren, believe my compassion is boundless because I am devoting myself to the salvation of all mankind, overcoming many persecutions. Therefore, “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,” the teachings for the people in the Declining Latter Age of Dharma or *mappo*, will spread forever beyond the ten-thousand-year of *mappo* period. It has the merit of curing the (religious) blindness of all people and blocks the way to hell.**

(Nichiren, *Ho-on-jo*)

### **One’s Soul Will Grow Even After His Death!**

By Rev. Shokai Kanai

Buddhists, especially Japanese Buddhists, hold many memorial services after one’s death such as *Hi-gan* in March and September, *O-bon* in July or August, and Memorial services. At member’s homes, they enshrine a family shrine called *butsu-dan*. Inside the *butsu-dan*, holds the *Gohonzon* or the main object to be worshiped and *i-hai*, a wooden tablet with the name of an ancestor or *kako-cho* that is a record book of the family’s ancestors. Every morning the first person opens the page to the day of the month. The members of the family show appreciation those who passed away on that day and pray for them to rest in peace.

July is the *O-Bon* season. The reason for holding the O-bon Memorial Service was already explained in RADIANCE No. 3 last year. It was originally based on Maudgalyayana, one of Sakyamuni Buddha’s disciples, to save his mother from hell. Why was the Buddha’s disciple’s mother in hell? It was because his mother raised her son to be number one in the world and did not care what happened to everyone else’s children. She fed him the best food, gave him the best education, and best physical training. So Maudgalyayana became the top clairvoyant among the Buddha’s disciples. Since his mother was very selfish and only paid attention to her son throughout her lifetime, this created bad karma, thus she fell into hell after her death.

The recitation of the Lotus Sutra and chanting of its Sacred Title, “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,” has the power to save the souls even in hell. Chapter 12 of the sutra explains how Devadatta, Sakyamuni Buddha’s cousin who fell into hell because of his many bad intentions to harm the Buddha, was saved from hell and eventually became a Buddha.

A soul is the accumulated energy of one’s behaviors both good and bad during his or her life. We cannot see this energy, but it can be influenced. The energy of our ancestors is the reason we exist today. Now it is our turn to give our good energy to them by means of chanting and praying for them. Their souls will grow spiritually even after

their bodies have gone. When our ancestors attain Buddhahood, they have more power to protect us. Their descendants become happier and more secure in their lives.

In order for your ancestors to grow spiritually, we hold many memorial services. Please make your effort to attend the O-Bon Memorial Service on July 12.

## **DAILY PRACTICE**

Rev. Shoda Douglas Kanai

Listening to the news lately and much of it is negative. We are in a recession, unemployment is over 10 percent, many people seem to be losing their jobs, their homes, and their pride. There are wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, saber-rattling from North Korea, and social unrest in Iran. The list goes on. With such uneasiness, the time for *Mappo* or the Declining Latter Age of Dharma is upon us. Peace and tranquility has been replaced with unrest and violence. No one seems to be following the true teachings of the Dharma, the Lotus Sutra. This is the age (Mappo) that was predicted over two thousands years ago.

In this time of darkness, there is hope. Nichiren Daishonin, through his great understanding of the Lotus Sutra, drafted "*Rissho Ankoku Ron*" or Treatise on Spreading Peace Throughout the Country by Establishing the True Dharma, in which he tried to convince the government that through faith in the True Dharma, the Lotus Sutra, we can create Buddha Land here on earth and expel all the evil teachings. He also presented us with the Odaimoku, which captures the essence of the Lotus Sutra.

In "*Kanjin Honzon-sho*" or Treatise on Revealing Spiritual Contemplation and the Most Venerable One, by believing in and chanting the Odaimoku, we can unite with the Buddha and spring forth the Eternal Buddha Land in this world. Later he created the Mandala Gohonzon based on this writing.

As Nichiren Buddhists, we have the Gohonzon in a calm and tranquil place in our home. Some may have a "*butsudan*" or a cabinet that holds the Gohonzon, a Buddha or Nichiren's statue, a flower vase, a candle holder, an ancestor tablet, a cup for water or tea, an incense burner, a bell, and a food offering tray. This is our little sanctuary where we can begin to embolden the spirit of the Odaimoku and help start bringing the Eternal Buddha Land into reality. If we all practice, day and night, we will be able to slowly change our community and society. Spread the word! Peace can be contagious.

How to practice? There are many ways. At temple there is a set service order, based on ritual and advanced practice. But at home, feel free to follow a simpler service order that is comfortable for you. Sincerity is the key. Pray and chant from the heart not the mouth. Anyone

can read the sutras, but not everyone can capture the true essence. Below are two examples of a simple service that can be done at home.

Every morning pour a fresh cup of water or tea into a little cup (special cups are available online for purchase) and offer to the Gohonzon. If you have nice flowers in the garden, offer that as well in a small vase. Place it on the left side. Light a candle, place it on the right. There are many kinds, just be cautious it does not pose a fire hazard (there are battery powered candles that can be used). Light a stick incense and place in the center of the burner. Grab your *juzu*, place your hands together and chant the Odaimoku three times. Those who are advanced in practice may start reading the Service Book beginning with the Invocation, followed by “Verses for Opening the Sutra”, then recite Chapter 2 and 16 of the Lotus Sutra. After reading the “Daily Readings of Nichiren’s Words,” begin chanting the Odaimoku (as many times as possible), followed by “Difficulty of Keeping the Sutra”, Prayer, Four Vows and end with Odaimoku three times. Make sure to extinguish all flames.

Repeat again at night, before dinner or before you go to bed and remove the water and any food offerings. You can drink the water (some say it tastes better). During your prayers, show your appreciation to your ancestors, your loved ones or send healing energy to those who are sick and most importantly pray for world peace. We can change the world through Odaimoku.

For those of you who are not as advanced or do not have a Service Book, offer water to your Gohonzon in the morning, grab your *juzu* and chant the Odaimoku three times. Please pray by saying “Thank you” to all your ancestors, loved ones, and friends in need, and also pray for world peace. Conclude with another Odaimoku three times. At night when you return home from work, please offer rice if cooked or little bits of your dinner to the Gohonzon to share. Fruits and desserts are preferred because of the sweet smell which is more appealing than say bratwurst and sauerkraut or food high in spice and strong in smell. Before you go to bed, grab your *juzu*, chant Odaimoku three times, show your appreciations for the wonderful day just completed, retrieve the water, drink it and remove the food offering.

This daily habit, combined with weekly temple visits on Sunday, we will slowly change ourselves, our surroundings and eventually move the entire world towards peace.

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