



# Faith, Practice and Study

## Practice and Study With Faith As Our Basis

“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 phrase.”

“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,”  
*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 386

Some religions of both East and West place primary emphasis on faith, while others strongly stress practice or acts of kindness. Some promote learning and philosophical inquiry, while others discourage it, leaving such pursuits to priests or religious professionals. Nichiren Buddhism encourages all people to carry out a dynamic balance of the elements of faith, practice and study.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote the letter “The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” which contains the passage above, on May 17, 1273, while in exile at Ichinosawa on Sado Island. He was 52 at the time. Addressed to Sairen-bo Nichijo, this letter is Nichiren’s response to Sairen-bo’s question concerning the meaning of the phrase “the true aspect of

all phenomena” in the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

In speaking of faith, practice and study, Nichiren teaches that it is essential to make efforts in the two areas of practice and study based on strong faith in the Gohonzon.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda addressed the relationship between faith, practice and study, observing that “understanding [gained through study] gives rise to faith, and faith seeks understanding... The depth of one’s understanding elevates one’s faith. And elevated faith enhances understanding of our religious practice.”

Of these three fundamental elements, practice comprises both “practice for oneself” and “practice for others.” This means to chant

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as a personal practice for one's own benefit, as well as for the sake of others' happiness.

Study means to study and learn the principles of Buddhism based on the writings of Nichiren.

“Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism” means that no matter how wise or noble a Buddhist may appear outwardly, no matter how impressive a Buddhist temple or facility may be, unless people exert themselves in Buddhist practice and study, all this becomes a façade, and genuine Buddhism cannot exist.

“You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others” refers to the fact that to attempt to practice Buddhism only for one's own benefit while overlooking the happiness of others actually runs counter to the heart and intent of the Buddha, whose fundamental wish was to relieve all people of suffering.

Nichiren says, “Both practice and study arise from faith.” Genuine Buddhist faith finds expression in the actions to deepen one's understanding of the teachings and to help others connect to and learn about Buddhism, as well. It is not enough to simply believe in Buddhism. It is necessary to put one's belief into action.

Nichiren continues, “Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase.” Our practice accords with Nichiren's intent when we try our best to talk with others about the benefit of Buddhism, even if we are only able to offer a small glimpse into its teachings. As we do so, the beneficial power of the Mystic Law, awakened through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, will become fully active within us.

SGI President Ikeda writes: “Faith lies not in simply reciting the sutra. Nor does it lie in

eloquence or being skilled at giving guidance. A genuine Buddhist, no matter what happens, pursues the way of faith, practice and study as taught by Nichiren to the very end—a person who continues striving earnestly for kosen-rufu. Such conduct is the essence of Nichiren Buddhism” (February 9, 2001, *World Tribune*, p. 4).

It is very easy to stray from the course of pursuing “the way of faith, practice and study,” and, though at first it may seem that we enjoy a certain sense of freedom, this often leads to becoming complacent and selfish. In the end, we may drift from living in rhythm with the Law.

That is why we have the wonderful community of believers of the SGI: to help us progress along the path of growth, happiness and the advancement of kosen-rufu. The SGI is the Buddhist community that practices exactly as the Lotus Sutra teaches. In working together with fellow SGI members to spread Nichiren Buddhism, we develop and polish ourselves and will assuredly attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

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## What Are the Ten Worlds?

**T**hrough examining the “Ten Worlds”—a classification of 10 distinct states of life—we can get a clearer understanding of the dynamics of the Buddhist philosophy of the human condition and gain insight as to how to improve it.

The Ten Worlds are:

- **the world of hell;**
- **the world of hungry spirits (also called hunger);**
- **the world of animals (animality);**
- **the world of *asuras* (anger);**
- **the world of human beings (humanity or tranquillity);**
- **the world of heavenly beings (heaven or rapture);**
- **the world of voice-hearers (learning);**
- **the world of cause-awakened ones (realization);**
- **the world of bodhisattvas; and**
- **the world of Buddhas.**


Among these, hell, hunger, animality, *asuras*, humanity and heaven are known collectively as the “six lower worlds” or the “six paths.” The worlds of voice-hearers, cause-awakened ones,

bodhisattvas and Buddhas are known as the “four noble worlds.”

The idea of the six paths originates with the ancient Indian worldview that envisions six broad realms within which all living beings transmigrate through the repeated cycle of death and rebirth. Buddhism adopted this view. The four noble worlds indicate levels or states beyond the six paths that are achieved through Buddhist practice.

Sutras other than the Lotus Sutra often define these worlds as places inhabited by certain kinds of beings, or, in the case of the four noble worlds, by Buddhist practitioners. For instance, hell is viewed as a place of torment that exists underground, while Buddhas and bodhisattvas are believed to dwell in pure lands far from the ordinary realm of human beings.

But the Lotus Sutra overturns this way of thinking, teaching “the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.” Rather than distinct realms, the Ten Worlds are conditions of life that everyone has the potential to experience at any time.



Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside oneself; both lie only within one’s own heart. Awakened to this, one is called a Buddha; deluded about it, one is called an ordinary person. The Lotus Sutra reveals this truth, and one who embraces the Lotus Sutra will realize that hell is itself the Land of Tranquil Light” (“Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 456).

What does this mean for us? From one perspective, though in one moment we may experience the misery characterized by the world of hell, in that same moment, through Buddhist practice, we can begin transforming our lives so that we can savor the deep, inexhaustible joy of the world of Buddhahood.

## **The World of Hell**

**T**he Japanese word for hell, *jigoku* (Skt *naraka*), suggests an “underground prison.” Buddhist texts describe various hells, including hot hells and cold hells. Hell represents the basest human condition in which one is fettered by agony, completely lacking in freedom.

Nichiren writes, “Hell is a dreadful dwelling of fire,” (“Letter to Niike,” WND-1, 1026). If we consider hell as a potential state of life, it describes being so overwhelmed that our suffering seems to engulf us completely, like roaring flames. Nichiren also states, “Rage is the world of hell” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358). *Rage*, here, means desperation and resentment arising from the inability to quell misery, with no hope of respite from torment. We could also say that in the world of hell we are controlled by destructive impulses. War, which embodies extremes of human misery, can be considered an expression of the world of hell.

## **The World of Hunger**

**T**he world of hungry spirits, or hunger, is characterized by overwhelming desires and the suffering that comes from those desires going unfulfilled.

The Japanese term *gaki* (Skt *preta*), translated as “hungry spirit” or “hungry ghost,” originally referred to the dead. This is because the dead were thought to be in a constant state of starvation. The world of hunger is a condition in which our mind and body burn with constant intense craving.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, “The realm of hungry spirits is a pitiful place where, driven by starvation, they devour their own children” (“Letter to Niike,” WND-1, 1026). He also says, “Greed is [the world] of hungry spirits” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358). To be hungry to the point of devouring one’s own children is to be ruled by the misery of craving that knows no bounds.

Desire in itself is neither good nor bad. Without a sense of hunger when our bodies need nourishment, we would starve to death. Desires and wants can provide impetus for self-improvement, for human advancement. In the world of hunger, however, we are unable to use desires creatively. We become slaves to them and suffer as a result.

### **The World of Animals**

**T**he world of animals, or animality, is characterized by motivation based on immediate gain or loss rather than on reason or logic. Nichiren Daishonin says, “Foolishness is [the world] of animals” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358). When in the state of animality, one acts based on instinct or impulse, unable to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil.

Nichiren also writes, “It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong” (“Letter from Sado,” WND-1, 302), and that the realm of animals is characterized by the need “to kill or be killed” (“Letter to Niike,” WND-1, 1026). In the world of animality, people lack reason and conscience, seeing life as a struggle for survival in which they are willing to harm others to protect themselves. Unable to look beyond the immediate, they cannot plan for the future. Such a state of ignorance ultimately leads to suffering and self-destruction.

While Buddhism draws from ancient Indian tradition in associating this state of life with animals, in reality, animals can exhibit qualities, such as loyalty and selflessness, that humans would gain by learning from; and in many ways animals play an irreplaceable role in supporting human life. On the other hand, human beings can be capable of baseness and cruelty, such as seen in wartime, that surpasses anything in the animal world.

Because the worlds of hell, hungry spirits and animals all represent conditions of suffering, they are collectively known as the “three evil paths.”



**Desires  
Can Lead to  
Growth**

## The World of Asuras

An *asura* is a contentious god or demon found in Indian mythology. One characteristic of those in the life-state known as the world of *asuras*, also called anger, is a strong tendency to compare themselves with others and a preoccupation with surpassing them. When they see themselves as superior to others, these people become consumed with arrogance and contempt. If, on the other hand, they encounter a person who seems clearly their superior, they become obsequious and given over to flattery.

People in the world of *asuras* often put on airs in order to impress others with their self-perceived greatness.

On the surface, those in this world may appear well-intentioned and civil, even humble. Inwardly, however, they harbor jealousy or resentment toward those they sense as better than them. This conflict between outward appearance and behavior and inner feelings and orientation makes those in the world of *asuras* prone to hypocrisy and betrayal.

This is why Nichiren Daishonin writes that “perversity is [the world] of asuras” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358). The Japanese word *tenkoku*, translated here as “perversity,” is composed of two characters, one meaning “to submit without revealing one’s true intent,” and the other meaning “bent” or “twisted.”

Unlike the three evil paths—the worlds of hell, hunger and animality—in which one is controlled by the three poisons (the fundamental human delusions of greed, anger and foolishness), those in the world of *asuras* display a stronger degree of self-awareness and control. In this sense, it could be considered a higher state than the three evil paths. Nevertheless, remaining in the condition of *asuras* ultimately gives rise to suffering and therefore constitutes, together with hell, hunger and animality, one of the “four evil paths.”

Though the world of *asuras* is often called the world of anger, this does not mean it is characterized by rage or the tendency to lose one’s temper. Rather, it suggests an abiding sense of contention or predisposition toward conflict arising from self-centered ambition.

## The World of Human Beings

The world of human beings, or humanity, is a condition of composure and tranquillity. Thus, Nichiren Daishonin says, “Calmness is [the world] of human beings” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358).

One aspect of the world of humanity is the quality of reason that enables us to distinguish right from wrong and to make judgments based on that distinction. In this condition, a person also has a fair degree of self-control. “The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals” (“The Three Kinds of Treasure,” WND-1, 852), writes Nichiren.

To remain in this state of humanity, however, requires effort. In a world rampant with negative influences, continuing to live in a truly human manner is not easy. It is actually impossible without making consistent efforts for self-improvement. Among the Ten Worlds, the world of human beings is the first in which we can approach overcoming our own weaknesses.

Furthermore, those in the world of humanity, while vulnerable to negative influences, are also capable of exerting themselves in Buddhist practice and thereby advancing to the four noble worlds.

## **The World of Heavenly Beings**

**T**he name of this world derives from the Indic word *deva-loka*, which means the place where gods and superhuman god-like beings reside.


In Buddhist philosophy, the world of heavenly beings, or heaven, refers to a condition of life in which one experiences the joy of having one’s desires fulfilled. Hence, Nichiren says, “Joy is [the world] of heaven” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358).

Human beings experience many kinds of desire. There are fundamental or instinctual desires, such as for sleep and food. There are desires for material things, as well as social, intellectual and spiritual desires. In general, we can think of the world of heaven as the condition of joy that pervades our lives at having any of these various desires fulfilled.

But the joy associated with the world of heaven is not lasting; it eventually weakens and disappears. The world of heaven, therefore, is not the condition of genuine happiness that Buddhism aims to achieve.

## **From the Six Paths to the Four Noble Worlds**

**T**he six worlds discussed above, which together constitute the six paths, describe states of life easily influenced by external circumstances. Those who remain in them cannot enjoy true freedom or independence.



The aim of Buddhist practice is to transcend these six paths and build a self-determined happiness uncontrolled by the environment. The conditions of life a person develops through Buddhist practice are known as the four noble worlds, the worlds of voice-hearers (learning), cause-awakened ones (realization), bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

### **The Worlds of Voice-Hearers and Cause-Awakened Ones**

In Hinayana teachings, the two worlds of voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones (also called the worlds of learning and realization) represented the two highest states Buddhist practitioners could attain and are together called the “two vehicles.”

“Voice-hearers” originally meant those who had achieved a partial awakening through hearing (listening to) a Buddha’s teachings. In contrast, cause-awakened ones were those who had achieved an awakening on their own, through their connection with or observation of various phenomena.

The partial enlightenment that characterizes both worlds of the two vehicles consists of an awakening to the transience or impermanence of all things. Impermanence indicates the reality that all phenomena change with the passage of time and eventually die out and cease to exist. Those who possess the life-condition of the two vehicles, having overcome the tendency to be attached to impermanent things, can view themselves and the world objectively, awakened to the truth that everything in this real world changes and perishes with the passage of time.

Nichiren Daishonin says: “The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles are present in the human world?” (“The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” WND-1, 358). He is saying that within the world of humanity exists the potential for the life-states of the two vehicles.

Considering the Ten Worlds as potential conditions of human life, we could say that the worlds of learning and realization represent states of awakening and self-determination that transcend those of the six paths. People in these states may be inquisitive, intellectual and creative. The shortcomings those in these conditions face, however, are those of complacency—the assumption that one has reached a pinnacle of development—and a preoccupation with personal attainment to the exclusion of concern and effort for the good of others. It is this tendency toward self-centeredness on the part of people of the two vehicles that caused early Mahayana Buddhist scriptures to deny them the possibility of attaining enlightenment.

## The World of Bodhisattvas

**B**odhisattvas are beings who relentlessly exert themselves in order to gain the enlightenment of a Buddha. Persons of the two vehicles, though regarding the Buddha as their teacher, do not believe themselves capable of attaining the same state of enlightenment as the Buddha. In contrast, bodhisattvas not only regard the Buddha as their teacher but also aim to realize the same supreme enlightenment as that of the Buddha. In addition, bodhisattvas believe that all people can attain Buddhahood and work to spread the Buddha's teaching widely so as to relieve people's suffering and lead them to happiness.

What distinguishes bodhisattvas is their strong spirit to seek the world of Buddhahood, the highest state a human being can manifest, as well as their efforts to share with others the benefits they have obtained through Buddhist practice. Bodhisattvas are preoccupied, before all else, with a strong wish for people's happiness.

The world of bodhisattvas is a state of life in which one acts with a sense of mission for the sake of people and for the Law. Compassion is fundamental to this world. The Sanskrit term for compassion, *karuna* (Jpn *jih*), is sometimes translated as "loving kindness" or "mercy." Regarding this, Nichiren Daishonin says: "Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children. He too has a portion of the bodhisattva world within him" ("The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," WND-1, 358). Here, Nichiren reminds us that all people, even the cruel and corrupt, have the potential for compassion.

It is the nature of those who exhibit the world of bodhisattvas to base their lives and actions upon compassion for all people.

## The World of Buddhas

**T**he world of Buddhas, or Buddhahood, is a supremely noble and virtuous state of life. The Sanskrit word *buddha* means "one who has awakened." A Buddha is someone enlightened to the Mystic Law, the wonderful law or principle that is the basis of all life and phenomena in the universe.

Specifically, "the Buddha" refers to Shakyamuni, also known as Gautama or Siddhartha, who lived and taught in India roughly 2,500 years ago.

The Buddhist sutras describe various other Buddhas such as Amida and Mahavairochana, but these are mythical figures intended to represent the wonder and greatness of a particular virtue or quality of the Buddha's enlightened state of life.

Nichiren Daishonin appeared in the Latter Day of the Law, the age in which Shakyamuni's teachings had been predicted to fall into decline and



**Compassion  
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become ineffective in leading people to enlightenment. To save all people in the Latter Day from suffering, Nichiren manifested the world of Buddhahood in his own life as proof that an ordinary human being could do so. Because he established the way by which all people can attain Buddhahood, he is respected as the true Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

The world of Buddhas is a life-condition rich in noble virtue and good fortune that emerges when individuals awaken to the reality that the source and foundation of their very lives is the Mystic Law. A Buddha is someone who opens this state of life within and thus embodies unsurpassed compassion and wisdom. And, fueled by that compassion and wisdom, a Buddha works constantly to enable all people to manifest the same world of Buddhahood.

All of us inherently possess the world of Buddhahood, but bringing that condition forth amid the reality of our lives is no easy matter. For that reason, the Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon, the object of devotion, as an embodiment of the world of Buddhahood he had attained. He did this to provide a means for all to bring forth Buddhahood in their own lives.

Regarding this, he writes: “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. The Buddha’s will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (“Reply to Kyo’o,” WND-1, 412).

The world of Buddhahood, the state that Nichiren manifested, in essence, is the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. When we believe in the Gohonzon and strive to chant for our own happiness and that of others, we can tap the world of Buddhahood inherent within us and embody it in our lives.

In “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” Nichiren refers to the deep connection between faith and our innate Buddhahood. He writes, “That ordinary people born in the latter age can believe in the Lotus Sutra is due to the fact that the world of Buddhahood is present in the human world” (WND-1, 358).

The Lotus Sutra reveals that all people are innately Buddhas; we human beings can believe in that teaching precisely because our lives fundamentally possess the world of Buddhahood.

Based on Nichiren’s statement above, Nichikan, the great scholar of Nichiren Buddhism, wrote, “A heart that strongly believes in the Lotus Sutra is [another] name for the world of Buddhahood.” The Lotus Sutra here means the Gohonzon. And the world of Buddhahood is none other than absolute happiness gained from basing one’s life on chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon in the face of any and all circumstances.

Buddhist texts, including Nichiren’s writings, often liken the world of Buddhahood to a lion king. Like the lion king, those who have activated their Buddhahood neither fear nor are daunted by anything or anyone. It is a condition of courage, genuine peace, absolute happiness and enlightenment.



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## Changing Destiny

**W**e often hear that we can change our karma through practicing Nichiren Buddhism. But what does this actually mean?

Nichiren Buddhism exists to relieve people of suffering and enable them to become truly happy. Toward that end, it teaches the law of cause and effect, which underlies the Buddhist doctrine of karma.

Through our actions, we create causes in the present, either good or bad, which become engraved in our lives as a potential called *karma*. The word *karma* means “action.” Our good and bad causes manifest as positive or negative effects in the future. Events

or patterns, bad or good, in this life are seen as effects of negative or positive causes made in past lives.

### **“The Sufferings of Hell Will Vanish Instantly”**

Since negative effects usually draw more attention, the word *karma* tends to be associated with inescapable sufferings or bad outcomes.

If karma is inescapable, then why do we need to learn about it? The Nichiren Buddhist answer to this is a vital point that distinguishes it from other forms of Buddhism.

In general, the theory of karma describes the law of cause and effect as being based on a kind of retributive justice—the view that people cannot be happy until they receive, and thereby expunge from their lives, all the negative karmic effects resulting from past negative causes.

But, since life is an eternal, ongoing process, and negative karma from the past is potentially unlimited, it would be impossible to expiate every possible negative effect.

Also, according to this view, because of the vast hurdle posed by one's negative karma, to create enough good causes to attain enlightenment, or Buddhahood—that is, to become absolutely happy—would require endless lifetimes of good causes. That is why most Buddhist teachings other than the Lotus Sutra speak of “endless *kalpas* of practice” being necessary to attain Buddhahood.

But Nichiren Daishonin taught that this view of karma, while accurate on one level, does not clarify the process for creating a truly happy life and a peaceful world.

He writes: “One who slights another will in turn be despised. One who deprecates those of handsome appearance will be born ugly... This is the general law of cause and effect.”

He continues: “My sufferings, however, are not ascribable to this causal law. In the past I despised the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. I also ridiculed the sutra itself, sometimes with exaggerated praise and other times with contempt” (“Letter from Sado,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 305).

Nichiren teaches that in contrast to the general causal law, the deepest causes and effects arise from our relationship to the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which functions at the core of life itself. Nichiren identifies the source of all the opposition and suffering he faces as he propagates the Lotus Sutra, which expounds the workings of this Mystic Law, as his own past disbelief in and disparagement of this Law. By facing the hardships that come from his committed propagation of the Law, he is not only deeply expiating his karma but also fully activating within his life the state of Buddhahood. The same process applies to each of us.

Nichiren further clarifies that the source of negative karma is life's fundamental darkness or ignorance, which makes it difficult to recognize the functioning of the Mystic Law within our own lives and in the lives of others. By recognizing and striving to work in harmony with this Law, we can overcome our fundamental darkness, the root source of karmic suffering. When we do so, Nichiren says, “the sufferings of hell will vanish instantly” (“Lessening One's Karmic Retribution,” WND-I, 199).

But does this mean that karma itself vanishes instantaneously when we practice Nichiren Buddhism? Certainly not. Rather, it means that our negative karma quickly pales in significance compared to the wisdom and life force that fill our lives when we awaken to our Buddha nature.



**Activate Your  
Buddhahood**



**Respect  
and Value  
All People**

As an example, Nichiren says that once the sun rises, the stars in the sky are no longer visible (see “The Selection of the Time,” WND-1, 575). Similarly, once the sun of the Mystic Law rises in our hearts through our deepening faith based on strong Buddhist practice, our problems stemming from karma become trivial and insignificant in comparison. Our negative karma from the past can no longer dictate the direction of our lives. In a sense, we change our destiny fundamentally by activating a much deeper and more powerful inner source of causes and effects.

### **Great Opportunities To Forge Our Lives**

No one is free from negative karma, which inevitably appears as obstacles and problems. But by practicing Nichiren Buddhism, we can confront and transform all of it. It is important, therefore, that we face our challenges head-on while chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with strong determination. Trying to avoid or run away from problems deprives us of opportunities to change our karma.

Nichiren writes: “Iron, when heated in the flames and pounded, becomes a fine sword” (“Letter from Sado,” WND-1, 303), and “the flaws in iron come to the surface when it is forged” (“Letter to the Brothers,” WND-1, 497). A strong sword is made by pounding a piece of hot iron and bringing out its impurities. Likewise, we can develop an unbreakable, solid self by squarely confronting and overcoming obstacles.

Since the early days of the Soka Gakkai, members have continually transformed their karma while working to transform the destiny of humankind by propagating Nichiren Buddhism, or working for kosen-rufu. As a result, they have developed an unshakable condition of happiness.

SGI activities are wonderful opportunities to forge our lives and transform any kind of negative karma into good fortune and happiness.



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## What Is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?

**F**riends or acquaintances curious about Nichiren Buddhism often ask what Nam-myoho-renge-kyo means. This is a very important and difficult question, one that cannot really be answered in a brief or cursory way. It's best to consider what Nichiren Daishonin himself said about this.

Nichiren tells us, "There is no true happiness for human beings other than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" ("Happiness in This World," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 681). He goes on to explain that while life is naturally filled with joy and suffering, ups and downs, there is a deeper and more enduring

happiness. This he calls the "boundless joy of the Law" (WND-1, 681) that underlies and supersedes the cycles of temporary happiness and suffering all people experience.

Nichiren identified the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the means to establish that kind of deep-seated, enduring and genuine happiness.

### **The Title of the Lotus Sutra**

In his writings and recorded oral teachings, Nichiren Daishonin comments in detail and from various perspectives on the meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

First, the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha's highest teaching, is *Myoho-rence-kyo*.

The Lotus Sutra's Sanskrit title is *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra*. The renowned fourth-century Buddhist scholar and translator Kumarajiva fully grasped the meaning behind the Lotus Sutra's title and translated it from Sanskrit into Chinese as *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*. In Japanese, these Chinese characters are pronounced *Myoho-rence-kyo*.

To Nichiren, this phrase signified something far beyond being simply the title of a Buddhist text. His adding *namu* (pronounced "nam" when chanting) to *Myoho-rence-kyo* is very significant. *Namu* or *nam* is a transliteration of the Sanskrit word *namas*, which is translated as "to dedicate one's life." *Dedication*, Nichiren says, means "dedication to the principle of eternal and unchanging truth" (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 3). And *life* indicates that, when dedicated to this principle, our lives become based on wisdom that perceives the truth and functions in response to any changing circumstance.

What does this mean to us? When we live our lives based on *Myoho-rence-kyo*, the Mystic Law—the ultimate truth or Law of life—we access and exhibit the wisdom necessary to deal effectively with any situation, creating the most valuable outcome.

Nichiren says, "We may also note that the *nam[u]* of *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo* is a Sanskrit word, while *myoho-rence-kyo* are Chinese words" (OTT, 3). He suggests here that the teaching of *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo* is not limited to any one language or culture. For Nichiren, in 13th-century Japan, Sanskrit represented the cultures and languages of the western part of the world, while Chinese represented the cultures and languages of the East. As a merging of the languages of East and West, *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo* is a phrase that represents the voices of all humanity, a universal teaching.

Nichiren practiced this principle exactly as taught in the Lotus Sutra and spread it for the happiness of all human beings. In doing so, he encountered harsh persecutions, as had been predicted in the Lotus Sutra to befall the sutra's votary (correct and devoted practitioner). In this sense, he "read" the Lotus Sutra with his entire life. That is, he fully realized a state of oneness with the essential Law or truth of life, *Myoho-rence-kyo*. This is what he means when he writes, "The Buddha's will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than *Nam-myoho-rence-kyo*" ("Reply to Kyo'o," WND-1, 412).

Because he manifested this Law in his life for the sake of all people, Nichiren Daishonin is respected as the true Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.



## Wisdom To Perceive Truth

## What Is the Meaning of Myoho-rence-kyo?

In brief, *myo* of *myoho* means “wonderful” or “mystic,” and *ho* means “law,” “principle,” “teaching” or “phenomena.” Together, *myoho* is translated as “Wonderful Law” or “Mystic Law.” Nichiren Daishonin says: “*Myo* stands for the Dharma nature or enlightenment, while *ho* represents darkness or ignorance. Together *myoho* expresses the idea that ignorance and the Dharma nature are a single entity” (OTT, 4). *Myoho*, then, expresses the enlightened nature of a Buddha and the deluded nature of an ordinary person, and the fact that they are essentially one.

While most Buddhist schools see a huge difference between a Buddha and an ordinary person, Nichiren aimed to erase any idea of separation between the two. For instance, in “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” he writes: “Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpas ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another. To chant Myoho-rence-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death” (WND-1, 216).

He also writes, “*Myo* represents death, and *ho*, life” (WND-1, 216). And in “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” he writes, “*Myo* is the name given to the mystic nature of life, and *ho*, to its manifestations” (WND-1, 4). Hence, *myoho* is also the essence of life itself that becomes manifest while one is alive and continues in a latent state in death.

*Renge*, literally “lotus flower,” also has a profound meaning in Nichiren Buddhism. Because the lotus produces both flower and



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seeds at the same time, it illustrates the principle of the “simultaneity of cause and effect.” In other words, flower and seed, cause and effect, Nichiren says, are a “single entity” (OTT, 4).

Here, *cause* refers to the efforts or practice one carries out with the aim of becoming a Buddha, and *effect*, to the actual attainment of Buddhahood. The simultaneity of cause and effect means that the very moment we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the intention of improving our lives, the life-condition of Buddhahood, imbued with courage, compassion and wisdom, emerges within us.

The final character, *kyo*, Nichiren describes as the “words and voices of all living beings” (OTT, 4). *Kyo*, literally “teaching,” indicates the teaching the Buddha expounded with his voice. Nichiren explains, “The voice carries out the work of the Buddha, and it is called *kyo*” (OTT, 4). This means that our voices when chanting or speaking to others about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo resonate with and stimulate the Buddha nature within us, within others and in our environment.

There are many other ways and perspectives from which Nichiren explains each character of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the overall significance of the phrase. Most important, though, is to remember that it signifies dedicating our lives to the Mystic Law. Acting based upon that Law, we work for our own happiness and growth, and that of others.

In fact, Nichiren tells us that, while Nam-myoho-renge-kyo was known by Buddhist teachers of the past, they did not spread it, and the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that he teaches differs from theirs in an important way. He writes: “Now,



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however, we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, and the daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] that I, Nichiren, chant is different from that of earlier ages. This Nam-myoho-renge-kyo encompasses both practice for oneself and the teaching of others” (“On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws,” WND-2, 986).

## **What Should We Keep in Mind While We Chant?**

In Nichiren Buddhism, action is most important. Only by taking action and applying our Buddhist practice to our day-to-day challenges can we demonstrate the real power of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This becomes apparent through our character, our benefits and our victories in life.

Nichiren Daishonin says that in chanting, faith, or “the heart”—our intent and determination—is what is important (see “The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” WND-1, 1000). When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with firm conviction in our own limitless potential and that of others, with the determination to bring about our own happiness as well as the happiness of others, just as Nichiren taught, we will see clear proof of its power.

SGI President Ikeda, after speaking of the difficulty of discerning the line between success and failure, between joy and suffering, states: “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, however, directs us on a course to absolute victory. Nichiren Buddhism enables us to develop a serene life-state of inner abundance pervaded by the noble virtues of eternity, happiness, true self and purity. Those who embrace faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo possess far, far greater wealth than those who have the most staggering fortunes or the most luxurious mansions. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the life and fundamental Law of the universe. When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we have nothing to worry about. The Daishonin’s words are never false. The purpose of our faith and practice is to achieve happiness and victory in our lives. This is the reality of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, the one and eternal Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law” (March 5, 2010, *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Under President Ikeda’s leadership, SGI members alone have been earnestly dedicated to kosen-rufu—the worldwide spread of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—just as Nichiren Daishonin taught. As a result, they have been showing proof of its beneficial power for the sake of humanity on a global scale.





# The Gohonzon

A famous passage from the writings of Nichiren Daishonin states, “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart” (“Reply to Kyo’o,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 412).

*Honzon* is a Japanese word meaning “object of fundamental respect or devotion.” The prefix *go* means “worthy of honor.” While Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the ultimate Law of the universe, the Gohonzon is its graphic expression. As we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, focusing on the Gohonzon, we activate within us the power of this Law.

Every religion has an object of devotion. In many, it is a supreme being or god. The many schools of Buddhism have traditionally revered the Buddha and the Buddha’s teachings. The concept of the Buddha and the content of the teachings, however, have differed from school to school.

For example, Shakyamuni Buddha was an ordinary human being who dedicated his life to freeing people from suffering and leading them to enlightenment. But after his passing, people came to worship him as a deity. Various schools promoted praying to his statue or image in order to win his blessings.

Nichiren taught that people who view the Buddha or the Law as separate from themselves cannot realize their full potential. He said, “If you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but an inferior teaching” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” WND-1, 3).


## A Clear Mirror of Life

In contrast to worshipping the Buddha or Law as externals, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China, basing his teaching on the Lotus Sutra, set forth a meditative discipline for attaining enlightenment. He called this “observing the mind.” T’ien-t’ai’s philosophy recognized the potential for Buddhahood in all people. But his practice was too difficult to carry out amid the challenges of daily life. Only those of superior ability, living in secluded circumstances, had a chance of attaining enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin established a teaching and practice to directly awaken the innate enlightened nature in any human being—the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (see pp. 26–29). Enlightenment is more than just a state of mind. It encompasses the totality of our mental, spiritual and physical being, as well as our behavior. Introspection alone, as in T’ien-t’ai’s teachings, is inadequate for attaining enlightenment.



**Activate Your  
Buddha Nature**



Nichiren inscribed the Gohonzon to serve as a mirror to reflect our innate enlightened nature and cause it to permeate every aspect of our lives. SGI President Ikeda states: “Mirrors reflect our outward form. The mirror of Buddhism, however, reveals the intangible aspect of our lives. Mirrors, which function by virtue of the laws of light and reflection, are a product of human wisdom. On the other hand, the Gohonzon, based on the Law of the universe and life itself, is the culmination of the Buddha’s wisdom and makes it possible for us to attain Buddhahood by providing us with a means of perceiving the true aspect of our life” (*My Dear Friends in America*, second edition, p. 94).

And just as we would not expect a mirror to apply our makeup, shave our beards or fix our hair, when we chant to the Gohonzon, we do not expect the scroll in our altars to fulfill our wishes. Rather, with faith in the power of the Mystic Law that the Gohonzon embodies, we chant to reveal the power of our own enlightened wisdom and vow to put it to use for the good of ourselves and others.

Nichiren, emphasizing the nature of the Gohonzon’s power, writes: “Never seek this Gohonzon 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” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832).

## **An Expression of Nichiren’s Winning State of Life**

From childhood, Nichiren ignited within himself a powerful determination to rid the world of misery and lead people to lasting happiness. With this vow, he thoroughly studied the sutras and identified chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the essence of Shakyamuni’s teachings. In the course of propagating this practice, Nichiren overcame numerous harsh persecutions, including attempts on his life.

After the failed attempt to execute him at Tatsunokuchi in 1271, Nichiren began to inscribe the Gohonzon and bestow it upon staunch believers. Regarding this, he said: “From that time, I felt pity for my followers because I had not yet revealed this true teaching to any of them. With this in mind, I secretly conveyed my teaching to my disciples from the province of Sado” (“Letter to Misawa,” WND-1, 896).

Nichiren emerged victorious over the most powerful religious and secular oppression, and resolved to leave a physical expression of his winning state of life so all future disciples could bring forth that same life-condition.

Writing to his samurai disciple Shijo Kingo, he stated: “In inscribing this Gohonzon for [your daughter’s] protection, Nichiren was like the lion king. This is what the sutra means by ‘the power [of the Buddhas] that has the lion’s ferocity.’ Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?” (“Reply to Kyo’o,” WND-1, 412).



## The Treasure Tower

“The Emergence of the Treasure Tower,” the 11th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, describes a gigantic treasure tower emerging from beneath the earth and hovering in the air. Nichiren explains that this tower is a metaphor for the magnitude of human potential—the grandeur of the Buddha nature within all people (see “On the Treasure Tower,” WND-1, 299). Next, the sutra describes the Ceremony in the Air—a vast assembly of Buddhas, bodhisattvas and beings of all description, gathering from all corners of the cosmos. The Buddha employs special powers to raise the entire assembly into the air before the treasure tower. He then begins preaching his teaching.

Nichiren chose to depict on the Gohonzon, in written form, key elements of this Ceremony in the Air. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, representing the treasure tower, is inscribed down the center of the Gohonzon. Rather than a painted or sculpted image, which could not sufficiently capture the totality of a Buddha, Nichiren used the written characters of the Gohonzon to communicate the state of oneness with the Mystic Law that he realized in his own life. According to President Ikeda: “Such [a statue or image] could never fully express Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the fundamental Law



that includes all causes (practices) and effects (virtues). The invisible attribute of the heart or mind, however, can be expressed in words” (*The World of Nichiren Daishonin’s Writings*, vol. 2, p. 181).

President Ikeda also emphasizes: “Through our daily practice of [reciting the sutra] and chanting [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo], we can join the eternal Ceremony in the Air here and now. We can cause the treasure tower to shine within us, and to shine within our daily activities and lives. That is the wonder of the Gohonzon. A magnificent ‘cosmos’ of life opens to us, and reality presents itself as a world of value creation” (*The World of Nichiren Daishonin’s Writings*, vol. 2, p. 176).

## **The Gohonzon Exists in Faith**

While most can agree that everyone possesses a wonderful potential within, truly believing this about all people and living based on this belief is not easy. Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon so that anyone can believe in and activate his or her Buddha nature. Just having the Gohonzon, however, will not ensure this. Both faith and practice are essential to unlocking our powerful Buddha nature. Nichiren says: “This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith. This is what the sutra means when it states that one can ‘gain entrance through faith alone.’ ... What is most important is that, by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo alone, you can attain Buddhahood. It will no doubt depend on the strength of your faith. To have faith is the basis of Buddhism” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832).

## **The Banner of Propagation**

Nichiren Daishonin also says, “I was the first to reveal as the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra this great mandala” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 831).

Today, the SGI, through the leadership of its three founding presidents—Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda—has embraced the Gohonzon as Nichiren truly intended—as a “banner of propagation” of the Buddhist teaching that can lead humankind to peace and happiness. For that reason, members who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon and exert themselves in SGI activities to spread the Law in the spirit of the three presidents consistently achieve remarkable growth, benefit and victory in their lives.



# The Three Obstacles and Four Devils

**N**ichiren Daishonin states: “There is definitely something extraordinary in the ebb and flow of the tide, the rising and setting of the moon, and the way in which summer, autumn, winter, and spring give way to each other. Something uncommon also occurs when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood. At such a time, the three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear” (“The Three Obstacles and Four Devils,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 637).

When an airplane sits motionless on a runway, it encounters no resistance from the wind. As it accelerates down the runway, however, it meets resistance or drag from the air around it. The increasing wind resistance creates a lifting force under the wings, enabling the plane to become airborne. As long as the plane maintains sufficient speed, the opposing force of the wind will continue generating the lift necessary to sustain flight.

Similarly, when we exert ourselves in Buddhist practice and begin to move toward our lasting happiness, we will meet the “wind resistance” of internal and external obstacles that function to resist or to stop our advancement. Buddhism describes these functions as the “three obstacles and four devils.” In the case of an airplane, the appearance of wind resistance demonstrates that the plane’s speed has increased and that it is about to become airborne. For us, meeting the three obstacles and four devils is proof that we are accelerating toward happiness, our human revolution<sup>1</sup> and the transformation of our karma.


T’ien-t’ai states in *Great Concentration and Insight*: “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere... One should be neither influenced nor frightened by them” (“Letter to the Brothers,” WND-1, 501). Regarding this passage, Nichiren writes, “This statement not only applies to me, but also is a guide for my followers. Reverently make this teaching your own, and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations” (WND-1, 501).

As Nichiren Daishonin points out, a characteristic of obstacles and devils is that they emerge “in confusing form.” It is important to understand them, so that we can better recognize and overcome them. Otherwise, we may be influenced and frightened to the point that we stop practicing. Sadly, this would mean we had stopped advancing toward our happiness.

The three obstacles are: (1) the obstacle of earthly desires; (2) the obstacle of karma; and (3) the obstacle of retribution. Nichiren states, “The obstacle of earthly desires is the impediments to one’s practice that arise from greed, anger, foolishness, and the like;



**Be Courageous  
and Steadfast**



the obstacle of karma is the hindrances presented by one's wife or children; and the obstacle of retribution is the hindrances caused by one's sovereign or parents" (WND-I, 501).

If we are distracted from pursuing the path to our lasting happiness or Buddhahood that we seek through Buddhist practice because of our greedy, angry or foolish nature, then we would be under the influence of the first of the three obstacles. If we are discouraged from pursuing the path to true happiness due to opposition from family or people in positions of authority, then we would have succumbed to fear of the second and third obstacles.

The four devils are negative functions that hinder our practice. They are: (1) the hindrance of our own physical and mental functions; (2) the hindrance of earthly desires; (3) the hindrance of untimely death, especially the doubts arising from the untimely death of a fellow practitioner; and (4) the hindrance of the devil king of the sixth heaven, or succumbing to opposition from people of authority.

The three obstacles and four devils weaken our spirit to fight for our own happiness, causing our life-condition to decline. As a result, our practice produces less wisdom and courage. In other words, they sap the bright, positive life-condition of practitioners from within.

In particular, the devil king of the sixth heaven is most powerful. Nichiren states, "Fundamental darkness manifests itself as the devil king of the sixth heaven" ("The Treatment of Illness," WND-I, 1113). We should understand that the devil king is a personification of fundamental destructive tendencies residing in the lives of all people. This devilish nature destroys the roots of goodness people have cultivated in their lives and feeds the desire to control others, even to the point of taking others' lives. If left unchecked and unchallenged, this negativity leads to destruction and war. Ultimately, all three obstacles and four devils are, in fact, negative functions that lead people to misery and suffering.

Nichiren says, "[The devil king of the sixth heaven] also possesses the sovereign in order to threaten the votary of the Lotus Sutra" ("Letter to the Brothers," WND-I, 496). This tells us that the devil king can also operate through governmental authority. When that happens, we must keenly see through its devilish nature and prevail against any opposition that tries to prevent our practice of faith.

Therefore, it is important to be prepared for these obstacles and functions, and when they appear—which they certainly will—to not be distracted or discouraged from the path we have embarked upon. Achieving lasting happiness or Buddhahood is an endless battle between our determination to change our lives for the better and our inner fundamental darkness, which makes succumbing to the three obstacles and four devils and remaining

the same seem attractive. In the face of obstacles and opposition, we should exert ourselves anew in our Buddhist practice with a strengthened and courageous determination. As a result, we will not be defeated by any obstacles, overcoming them all and continuing to advance.

The axiom Nichiren urges us to practice and propagate might be stated in this way: Along the path toward our absolute happiness, the three obstacles and four devils are certain to appear. We should be prepared for them and never be influenced or frightened by them.

When the three obstacles and four devils emerge, that is the time to transform our karma, fight for our human revolution and accelerate toward our happiness. As Nichiren says, “At such a time, the three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat” (“The Three Obstacles and Four Devils,” WND-1, 637). He urges us to never retreat but to joyfully challenge and overcome our problems. In doing so, we can greatly develop our state of life.


President Ikeda states, “It is important to have a sufficiently elevated life-condition so that you can calmly accept whatever happens in life, always striving to put problems into proper perspective and to solve them with a positive attitude. Happiness blossoms forth from such a strong and all-encompassing life-condition.

“You can forge the path to a fulfilling and enjoyable life if you have the depth of faith to regard everything as a source for creating happiness and value. Conversely, if you see everything in a negative or pessimistic light, your life will gradually but inevitably be plunged into darkness. Buddhism teaches the subtle principle of one’s determination and, moreover, the power of faith” (*My Dear Friends in America*, second edition, pp. 4–5).

Wise people will rejoice when confronted with the three obstacles and four devils, because they know that obstacles and opposition are the wind resistance that makes it possible for them to take flight toward Buddhahood.



1. Human revolution: The term used by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda to describe a fundamental process of inner transformation. Through Buddhist practice, we break through the lesser self, bound by self-concern and the ego, and grow in altruism toward a greater self, capable of caring and taking action for the sake of others.



**We Are All  
Equal**

# Benefit in Buddhism

Buddhism concerns itself with enabling people to live happy, fulfilling lives. The actual improvement we experience as a result of our Buddhist practice is known as benefit.

In Nichiren Buddhism, *benefit* (Jpn *kudoku*) is at times also translated as “blessing” or “virtue.” While it can refer to any positive outcome or gain, fundamentally it means the virtues or excellent qualities we develop in our lives through Buddhist faith and practice.

Many Buddhist sutras, after introducing a Buddhist teaching, explain the benefit gained by those who practice that teaching. “The Life Span of the Thus Come One,” the 16th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, reveals the sutra’s most important teaching—the eternal and universal quality of the Buddha nature innate in life. The chapters that follow are titled respectively “Distinctions in Benefits,” “The Benefits of Responding with Joy” and “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law.”

## Conspicuous and Inconspicuous Benefits

There are two categories of benefit gained from practicing Nichiren Buddhism: conspicuous and inconspicuous.

Conspicuous benefits are immediately noticeable and often tangible. They can range from financial gain to overcoming an illness to finding the optimum job.

Inconspicuous benefits are less easily observed, accruing over a longer time as a result of steadily persevering in Buddhist practice.

Nichiren states, “When in one’s heart one takes faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the heart becomes a dwelling and Shakyamuni Buddha takes up residence there. ...

“At first one is not aware of this, but gradually, as the months go by, the Buddha in the heart begins to appear as in a dream, and one’s heart becomes bit by bit ever more joyful” (“The Buddha Resides in a Pure Heart,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, p. 885).

Suppose you plant a sapling and watch it every day to see if it is growing. In truth, it will be nearly impossible to notice its growth from day to day. But after 5, 10 and 20 years, the fact that the sapling has transformed into a strong and tall tree will be clear to everyone. Similarly, when we consistently practice Buddhism for 5, 10 or 20 years, our lives strengthen, and our capacity expands to the point where we can take on greater and greater challenges. Ultimately, everything becomes

a source of joy and fulfillment. We also call this process of inner transformation *human revolution*.

In addition, Nichiren says that for people in this age known as the Latter Day of the Law, the benefits of Buddhist practice are primarily inconspicuous (see “The Teaching, Practice, and Proof,” WND-1, 474).

Most important then, is that we nurture and cultivate through faith and practice the “seed” of Buddhahood that is awakened within us when we first encounter Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. As time goes by, the life-state of Buddhahood will become deeply rooted within us, and we will fully enjoy the rich fruit of its benefit.



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## Changing Poison Into Medicine

Another way of looking at benefit in Nichiren Buddhism is through the principle of “changing poison into medicine.” In short, this means the transformation of adversity and negativity into rich possibility and deep joy.

Nargarjuna, the second- or third-century scholar of Mahayana Buddhism, explains that the power of the Lotus Sutra is “like a great physician who can change poison into medicine” (see “The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra,” WND-1, 146). And the Great Teacher Miao-lo says, “Because it can cure what is thought to be incurable, it is called *myo*, or wonderful” (see WND-1, 146). These statements describe the power of our practice of the Mystic Law to transform hopelessness into boundless hope, suffering into joy and fulfillment, and misfortune into fortune.



Referring to Nagarjuna's statement above, Nichiren writes: "What is the poison? It is the three paths of earthly desires, karma, and suffering that are our lot. What is the medicine? It is the Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation. And what does it mean to change poison into medicine? It means to transform the three paths into the three virtues: the Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation.... This is what the attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form means" ("What It Means to Hear the Buddha Vehicle for the First Time," WND-2, 743).

Here Nichiren equates poison with a life caught in the unfortunate cycle of earthly desires, karma and suffering. "Earthly desires" is a general term for delusions, cravings and negative impulses such as greed, anger, foolishness, arrogance and doubt. "Karma" is the negative potential created by bad actions—thoughts, words and deeds—arising from earthly desires. This potential remains in our lives and influences how we experience life. "Suffering" is the misery we go through because of our earthly desires and karma.

No one wants to suffer. But trying to reduce suffering while remaining deluded about the true nature of life leads to unwise actions. These become negative causes that create bad karma and bring about negative effects that increase our suffering rather than reduce it. As suffering intensifies, our desires and delusions also get stronger, and we get caught in a cycle of anguish.

When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, however, just as a skilled physician can create medicine out of poison, we can use our desires and suffering as a means for creating happiness. A life dominated by the three paths begins to shine with the three virtues that endow the life of a Buddha—the Dharma body, wisdom and emancipation. They constitute the "medicine" for establishing a life of joy and fulfillment.

The Dharma body, or the body of the Law, refers to the ultimate truth realized by a Buddha. Wisdom is the capacity to realize this truth. Emancipation means a rich and expansive state of life free from delusion.

## **Purification of the Six Senses**

Nichiren Daishonin also explains benefit as the "purification of the six sense organs."

Referring to the Lotus Sutra chapter title "Benefits of the Teacher of the Law," he says: "The word 'benefits' (*kudoku*) means the reward that is represented by the purification of the six sense organs. In general we may say that now Nichiren and his followers, who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, are carrying out the purification of the six sense organs. Hence they are acting as teachers of the Law of Myoho-renge-kyo and possess great

virtue (*toku*)” (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, pp. 147–48).

The six sense organs are the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body and mind. The first five correspond to the five senses, and the last, to the cognitive function that integrates and responds to input from those five.

Purification of the six sense organs means that through our practice of the Mystic Law, we can polish and clarify our powers of perception, discernment and good judgment, and respond in the most effective and appropriate way to any situation. This naturally leads to our growth, improvement and fulfillment.



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## **Wiping Out Evil, Bringing About Good**

The two Chinese characters for the word *benefit* can also be interpreted to mean “wiping out evil” and “bringing about good” (see OTT, 148).

Buddhism recognizes good and evil as innate potentials within all life and identifies the root cause of evil as ignorance: ignorance that one’s life is itself the Mystic Law, the fundamental law of life and the universe. It is the inability to recognize our own and others’ inherent enlightened nature. This innate ignorance of the fundamental reality of life, called “fundamental darkness,” is the source of negative impulses such as earthly desires and the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness.



President Ikeda describes the nature of fundamental darkness as follows: “Since the ultimate illusion of fundamental ignorance is the most difficult to recognize and identify, it can exert a harmful influence on our lives without our being aware of it. And, because fundamental darkness is inherent in all life, it produces dark impulses not only in our lives but in those of others as well” (*Learning from the Writings: The Hope-filled Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 173).

Ultimately, because evil is essentially a function of ignorance, it can be defeated with wisdom. “Wiping out evil” then can be accomplished by bringing forth the wisdom to overcome fundamental darkness, or life’s innate negativity, and defeat the suffering and unhappiness it produces.

President Ikeda continues: “A person who brings forth this kind of wisdom is a Buddha. The supreme wisdom for achieving this goal is found in the correct teaching of Buddhism, which is none other than the Lotus Sutra of Shakyamuni and the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo....

“By ‘substituting faith for wisdom’—bringing forth Buddha wisdom through faith in the correct teaching—we, as ordinary people, can triumph over fundamental darkness just as we are. The power with which we can subdue fundamental darkness is solely the power of faith, our minds and the inherent enlightened wisdom within our own lives” (*Learning from the Writings: The Hope-filled Teachings*, p. 173).

Through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with strong faith in our innate Buddhahood, we can overcome fundamental darkness, just as a lamp illuminates a dark room.

## **“Our Behavior As Human Beings” Is the Ultimate Benefit**

Nichiren Daishonin says: “The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being” (“The Three Kinds of Treasure,” WND-1, 852). The true benefit of Buddhist practice is expressed in our behavior. When our character and actions consistently demonstrate the virtue and noble qualities Buddhism aspires to, we shine with genuine happiness. The brightness of our humanity sparks the humanity in others, causing a wave of respect and compassion to spread to others.



1. In Japanese, the Chinese character for *toku*, also pronounced *doku*, means virtue and can also mean happiness.