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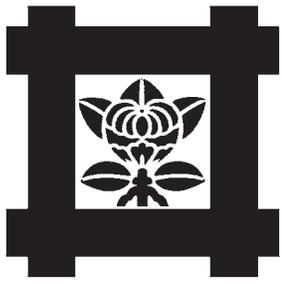
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THE WORLD OF THE ODAIMOKU – PART 10

The Light of the Odaimoku brightens the World

Rev. Jun-ichi Nakamura • Illustration by Hiroshige Katsu

The Object of Veneration of Nichiren Shu, the Most Venerable One, is also called Mandala. But the term of Mandala is not used exclusively by Nichiren Shu. The term of Mandala originates in the Sanskrit language of India. “Manda” means “essence” and “la” means “to gain”, so “Mandala” means to gain the essence, which is the essence of enlightenment of the Buddha. In order to receive salvation, ancient Indian people drew a circle on a mound and tried to show the truth of the Universe by arranging Buddhas and Bodhisattvas inside that circle. Nichiren Shōnin stated, “Mandala is a term of India. It also means to be perfect or to gather merits.” (*Nichinyo Gozen Gohenji*) His statement also tells about the history of Buddhism.

The Mandala was transmitted from China to Japan by Grand Master Kōbō (Kūkai). This is the first time a Mandala was brought to Japan. The new Buddhism was called Shingon



Mikkyo. This Esoteric Buddhism became so popular during the Heian Period (794-1191) due to Emperor Saga’s protection. In Shingon Esoteric Buddhism Kūkai placed Dainichi Nyorai, the Great Sun Buddha as the

highest Buddha in the Universe and tried to describe enlightenment and salvation of the Buddha with the world of the Mandala.

But Nichiren Shōnin did not agree with Kūkai’s idea. Śākyamuni Buddha was the highest Buddha for Nichiren Shōnin. And Śākyamuni Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra which he held in his bosom as he had appeared in this world. In the Lotus Sutra it is revealed that Śākyamuni Buddha is the Eternal Buddha who wishes everyone to attain Buddhahood. Nichiren Shōnin thought that instead of venerating the Great Sun Buddha one should concentrate on the Eternal Śākyamuni Buddha’s most excellent teaching which is that, the Lotus Sutra should

be located in the center of Mandala, which is the great light illuminating the whole universe.

In 1273 Nichiren Shōnin revealed the Great Mandala for the first time on



Sado Island where he had been exiled. He inscribed the Odaimoku, “Na-mu Myo-ho Ren-ge Kyo” with moving strokes. The Odaimoku consists of five kanji characters of Myo 妙, Ho 法, Ren 蓮, Ge 華 and Kyo 經 with two kanji characters of Na 南 and Mu 無. Namu Myoho Renge Kyo means absolute devotion to the unsurpassed teaching of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Shōnin stated, “I inscribed (the Odaimoku) with black ink containing my soul. You should believe that the Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra as His true intention. My true heart is nothing but Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.” (*Kyō-oh-dono Gohenji*)

The form of the Odaimoku inscribed in the Great Mandala is Nichiren Shōnin’s invention and sometimes it is called Hige-Daimoku, or Daimoku with a beard because some strokes of his pen hang down like a beard. But the long strokes are not a beard. The long extending lines are called Kōmyō-ten, expressing the light of the Lotus Sutra radiating out.

The Great Mandala Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren Shōnin is not some kind of picture but it is a work of calligraphy. It is a very simple form of Mandala. However, even though it is a simple form, the Great Mandala presents the ultimate wish of the Eternal Śākyamuni Buddha and the path to attain Buddhahood for all people. It is the most excellent Mandala. Nichiren Shōnin inscribed the Great Mandala with strong belief stating, “The Great Mandala has never appeared before in this whole world for two thousand two hundred and twenty some years after the Buddha’s extinction.” We, Nichiren Buddhists should worship the Great Mandala with firm faith.

When you look at the Great Mandala, you see names of the four heavenly kings who stand at the four corners. Heavenly kings are Indian gods who are believed to live in the realm of heaven. There are many gods who appear in the sutra as protective deities of the Dharma. Among them, the Four Heavenly Kings have a special mission. Their mission is to protect this world from enemies by standing on the four corners of the earth. *Jikoku-ten*, Dhrtarāstra, the Heavenly King of upholding the land, protects the east. *Kōmoku-ten*, Virūpākṣa, the Heavenly King of exceptional eyes, protects the west. *Zōchō-ten*, Virūdhaka, the Heavenly King of growing, protects the south. And *Bishamon-ten*, Viśravaṇa, protects the north.

Some statues of the Four Heavenly Kings depict them stamping their feet upon small devils called Ama-no-Jaki. The kings are not just bullying weak devils. These devils are fighting against the Buddha, so the Heavenly Kings discipline them so they may follow the Buddha’s teaching. We may need to take time to reflect upon ourselves as we consider the little devil which is our own mind. When we sit before the Great Mandala the light of the Odaimoku illuminates the depths of our mind.

Nichiren Shōnin stated, “This Great Mandala Gohonzon stays in two characters of *Shin* 信 *jin* 心, faith. This is the true meaning of *Ishin Tokunyū* 似信得入, entering the world of the Great Mandala with faith.” (*Nichinyo Gozen Gohenji*) Nichiren Shōnin’s words express the true meaning of the Great Mandala.



100th year Anniversary of the Great Bronze Statue of Nichiren Shōnin in Hakata is celebrated



 *Great Bronze Statue of Nichiren Shōnin stands in East Park of Hakata, facing toward Mongol.*

100th Year Anniversary is celebrated

Two thousand seven hundred Nichiren-Shu followers gathered together to celebrate the 100th year Anniversary of the Great Bronze Statue of Nichiren Shōnin on October 28, 2004 in Hakata, Fukuoka, Japan. To commemorate the 100th year Anniversary, three gates were constructed, to create a more solemn feeling when entering the property. During the 100th Anniversary ceremony, Rev.

Zengyo Sano who is the caretaker of the great statue acknowledged the support from the many Nichiren Shu temples and members by stating, “I could not stop my tears everyday when I received precious donations from all over Japan. The donations were used to build the three gates and path that leads to the great statue of Nichiren Shōnin as well as renovating the temple building. The contributions will remain in this sacred space forever. Please come to see Nichiren Shōnin’s Great Statue, and ask him if you have any worries, and listen to his answer. Put your hands together in Gassho and strengthen your faith.”

This statue stands in Higashi-kōen (East Park) of Fukuoka City and its total height is 22 meters (about 73 feet) from the ground. The height of Nichiren Shōnin’s figure itself, is 10 meters (about 33 feet). The statue of Nichiren Shōnin is facing West and is holding *Rissho Ankoku Ron* in scroll form in his left hand. He holds prayer beads (Juzu) in his right hand. The statue represents Nichiren Shōnin preaching the Lotus Sutra towards the Mongols overseas. On the front side of the statue on the base, the letters of “Rissho Ankoku” are engraved. Around the rest of the base, seven depictions of Nichiren Shōnin’s Life (his persecutions) are placed. There are always people circling the base while chanting the Odaimoku and praying. The depictions shine because the pilgrims touch them while circling the great statue.

The Origin of Building the Great Statue

In 1888 the Governor of Fukuoka Prefecture, Yasukazu Yasuba started the plan for the building of a monument to mark where the Mongolian attacks on Japan had taken place in that ancient battlefield. When Rev. Zenrei Sano, who was a resident minister of Honbutsuji Temple in Fukuoka, heard this news, he negotiated and agreed with the planners to put Nichiren Shōnin’s portrait in the monument. However, other religious organizations were against the agreement, so the planners cancelled the construction.

Rev. Sano decided to have a bronze statue of Nichiren Shōnin built by Nichiren Shu, so he applied for a construction permit from the Fukuoka Government. After being declined several times, he negotiated personally with Interior minister, Yorimichi Saigō and finally received permission to build the statue. In November, 1890 an opening ceremony was held for this project. Then, to raise funds for this project Rev. Sano along with his fellow ministers visited temples and sanghas all over Japan. However, ministers and lay people of other organizations tried to obstruct Sano’s campaign. Conflicts between Rev. Sano and other groups occurred here and there. Sometimes they had religious debates, sometimes they physically attacked Rev. Sano that he often encountered threats upon his life.



✿ Depictions of Nichiren Shōnin's life are placed around the base and shining because the pilgrims touch them.

In 1892 from April 23rd for three days, the ground breaking ceremony was held at the place where the statue would be built in the East Park. Some hundreds ministers officiated the ceremony and some ten thousands lay people surrounded the ceremony. On that day, Kyushu Railroad Company had passenger trains running short, so they transported the lay people with freight trains with temporary roof.

Thereafter, Rev. Sano and his fellows kept traveling all over Japan and collected donations and bronze mirrors and braziers that would become material for the statue. Total weight of the donated bronze was 37 tons.

In the spring of 1897, construction of the foundation started and more than 200 volunteers came to work everyday.

Although it was hard physical labor, they kept working hard with chanting the Odaimoku that echoed throughout the East Park.

Casting of the giant statue took place in Tokyo and Saga, Kyushu due to convenience of transportation. The head and both hands were cast in Tokyo and the

body was cast at Taniguchi Company in Saga. Seihachi Taniguchi, the owner of the company, was a strong Nichiren follower and eager to cast the statue with his own hands. Casting the main body was divided into seventeen pieces and took four years, completed on June 20th, 1904. The total weight of the statue was 75 tons.

On November 8th of 1904 a dedication ceremony of Nichiren Shōnin's Great Bronze Statue took place. Both sides of the path to the statue were decorated with banners, national flags and lanterns. Besides street stalls and shows, a new town within the East Park seemed to have appeared. During the ceremony conducted with over one hundred ministers, the Great Bronze Statue of Nichiren Shōnin was unveiled. The 73 feet tall statue appeared as if a stupa of many treasure sprung up from the underground expounded in the Lotus Sutra. All the hard efforts of Rev. Zenrei Sano and his fellows paid off at that moment. Tears were falling on Rev. Sano's face.



✿ 2,700 ministers and Nichiren Shu members gather together to celebrate the 100th year Anniversary of the Statue.



The Lotus Sutra for children

by Rev. Koge Matsumoto Translated by Rev. Shokai Kanai
 (The book was written for grandparents and parents to read to their children.
 The content is very deep but easy for all to understand.)

INTRODUCTION CHAPTER OF THE LOTUS SUTRA (VOLUME 2)

— Chapter 3 —

THE BUDDHA'S DISCIPLES

(Continued from the last issue)

Another great disciple was Maka-Kasyapa, who was “The Number One Leader of All.” He could solve all kinds of troubles and lead others to satisfaction. Other great disciples were Maka-Kuchira and Subhuti. They were “Number One Speakers.” Purna gave “The Best Sermon for All People to Easily Understand.”

One day Aniruddha, another important disciple, was so comfortable that he fell asleep while listening to the Buddha talk. He felt deeply ashamed and vowed never to fall asleep while listening to the Buddha. Later, he became blind but was able to have divine eyes of celestial beings. Therefore, he was called “The Possessor of The Number One Divine Eyes.”

Ananda, a younger brother of Devadatta, harmed Buddha Śākyamuni and tried to kill him. He felt very sorry and served the Buddha all His life; therefore, he was called “The Number One Servant.”

Two other great disciples were Nanda and Rahula. Nanda was Siddhartha’s half brother who was born to Siddhartha’s father and His step mother. Rahula was the only child of Buddha Śākyamuni. When Rahula was young, he always showed off. After joining the Buddha’s Sangha, he tried not to show off and practiced quietly behind everyone. He was called “The Number One Secret Practitioner.”

Ubhari was a slave and another great disciple of Buddha Śākyamuni. Slaves were not treated equally. They were not treated as human beings. However, the Buddha accepted Ubhari and treated him as equal with



the other disciples. Since he kept Buddhist precepts very honestly and sincerely, he was called “The Number One Keeper of the Precepts.” He was later chosen from among 12,000 as one of the Ten Great Disciples of the Buddha.

Buddha Śākyamuni always treated everyone equally.



~ Chapter 4 ~

ALL HUMAN BEINGS
ARE BUDDHA'S
CHILDREN

The baby of a lion never becomes an ox but always becomes a lion. All children of human beings become either men or women. All people are Buddha's children. They are able to become Buddhas if they uphold Buddha's teachings and keep their minds in the right way.



However, the sutras that were revealed before the Lotus Sutra did not teach that everyone is able to become Buddhas. As you learned in Chapter 2 of this volume, the Buddha didn't reveal the true teachings that are like the roots of a tree until 42 years after His Enlightenment.

For instance, according to a doctrine of some Buddhist schools, certain people are able to become Buddhas while others cannot. Those who are able to become Buddhas, will be able to do so even though they have made some mistakes. Those who are not able to become Buddhas, however, will never become Buddhas, even if they practice hard.

According to this doctrine, women are not able to become Buddhas since women are filthy in their bodies and minds. I guess the Buddha personally taught this doctrine to a wife who oppressed her husband and was fascinated by many other men. In order to give a warning to her, the Buddha might have taught her that she could not become a Buddha.

The Buddha taught different teachings sincerely to different people, depending on individual situations. The various teachings revealed before the *Lotus Sutra* were not the real teachings.

He could not teach the truth even though He wished to do so. Why? It was because women and slaves were not treated as human beings at that time in India. The society was based on a strong caste system that was an unchangeable class distinction based on birth. For instance, it was said that when a husband passed away, his surviving wife must be cremated together with the dead husband in order to show her faithfulness. Wasn't that cruel? Another example was that slaves were treated just like animals. When a rich man killed one or two slaves, he was not accused of

murder. Killing slaves was not a crime during the time when Buddha Śākya-muni lived.

Therefore, the Buddha taught the Five Precepts for all human beings to practice at a minimum. The precepts are not to kill any living beings, not to steal, not to tell a lie that causes suffering, not to be unfaithful to one's spouse and not to take any harmful substances that injure one's body.

Since the Buddha let the slave Ubhari join in the Sangha and later chose him as one of the Ten Senior Disciples, He kept the equality of all human beings deeply in his mind. Everyone is Buddha's child and has the seed to become a Buddha. He kept the Equality of All Mankind in His mind, but He did not tell anyone for 42 years.



~ Chapter 5 ~

THE TIME TO REVEAL THE TRUTH

How were the people in the caste system at that time in India able to understand “Equality of All Human Beings”? How many people would understand the Buddha’s teachings if He talked as He wanted to? Therefore, the Buddha decided not to talk about the truth, represented by the root of a tree, but instead gave teachings that were like the trunk, branches and leaves of a tree in order to purify people’s minds little by little.

Buddha Śākyamuni was now seventy-two years old. He knew he didn’t have many years left to his life. He thought

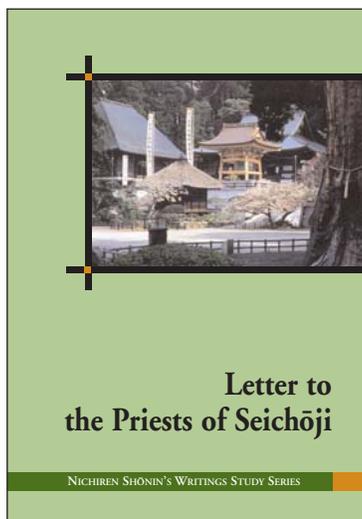
it was about time for Him to reveal the Lotus Sutra, the real reason He was born on this earth.

For 42 years Buddha taught that there are two types of people: those who can become Buddhas and those who cannot become Buddhas based on their birth. He must now reveal the teaching that would contradict what he had said before. Since He was going to reveal the truth, it could not be the teachings that the people preferred to hear. He must speak the truth! This is the teaching that men and women, landlords and slaves, ordained people and lay-people, and kings and servants are all equal and are all Buddha’s children.



Study Series of Nichiren Shōnin’s Writings have been published.

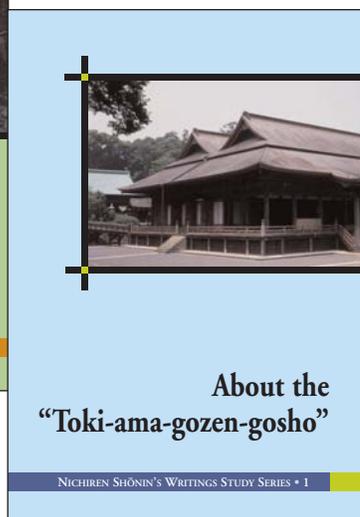
Volumes 1 and 2 of Study Series of Nichiren Shōnin’s Writings have been published by the Nichiren Buddhist International Center (NBIC). Original books were published by Nichiren Shu Headquarters and now have been translated into English by NBIC.



Each volume of this series is available from NBIC. \$5.00 donation is asked plus \$3.00 shipping/handling fee.

Volume 1 is about *Toki Ama Gozen Goshō*, which is actually Nichiren Shōnin’s letter sent to Toki Ama.

“A letter called *Toki Ama Gozen Goshō* contains Nichiren Shōnin’s important message to you, crossing time period over 700 years. You might have seen a wonderful phrase, “An arrow cannot fly without a bow. A cloud cannot move without a dragon. A man cannot work without a woman.” This phrase is stated in Nichiren Shōnin’s letter addressed to a female follower. This letter has been read by many people and it impressed them because Nichiren Shōnin is telling about important matters not only for people of his period but also for people in the present world, such as overcoming hardship and difficulties in life. This letter is strongly recommended to improve your life and strengthen your faith.” (from the preface of Volume 1)



Volume 2 is about *Seichoji Daishū-chū*, a letter to priests of Seichoji.

“In this letter addressed to priests of Seichōji Temple, Nichiren Shōnin talks about the situation of the time when he proclaimed that he established a new Buddhist stream and his own feeling. Needless to say spreading the Odaimoku is based on the establishment of the new Buddhist stream by Nichiren Shōnin. With this writing, we can understand his true heart of the establishment.”