

THE WORLD OF THE ODAIMOKU – PART 14

# Catch the Buddha's teaching – *Juji*, Receive and keep the teaching

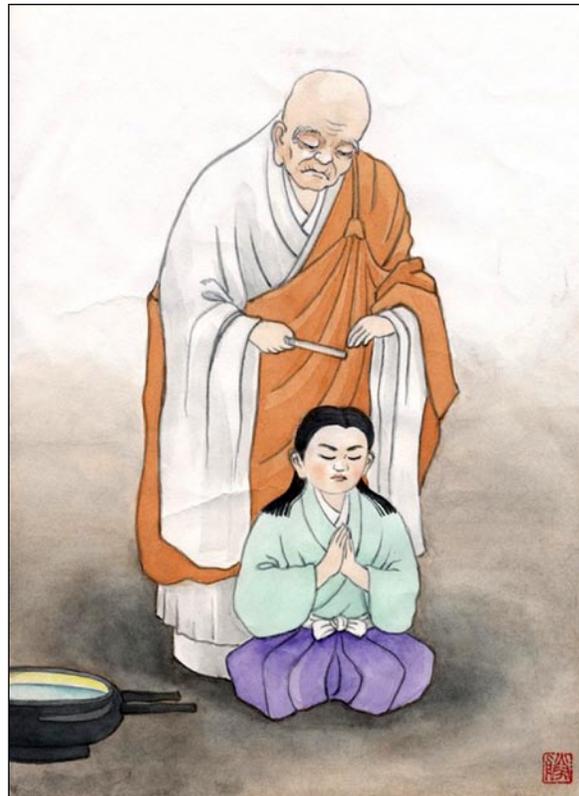
Rev. Jun-ichi Nakamura

Illustration by Hiroshige Katsu

*Juji* means to live this life, while upholding the Buddha's teaching with strong belief and faith. This is the top priority of the five kinds of practice for Dharma teachers, or *Goshu Hosshi-gyō*. When you practice daily service, you read *Kaikyō-ge*, the verses for opening the Sutra. In these verses, there is a phrase "*Ware ima kenmonshi juji surukoto wo etari*," translated to English as "Now we have been able to see, hear, receive and keep this sutra." So *Juji* may be a familiar term to you.

However, as the verses also say, "*Hyaku sen man gō nimo aitatematsuru koto katashi*," or "This sutra is difficult to meet even once in thousands and millions of aeons," we should be aware that it is not easy to meet the Buddha's teachings. Even so, the Buddha does not give his teachings to us sparingly. The Buddha rather tries to speak to us at all times and all

places. Nevertheless, we are not aware of that and tend to live this life while being captivated by the many distractions around us. In chapter sixteen



of the Lotus Sutra, "The duration of the Life Span of the Tathagata," this idea of our oblivious nature is stated by the Buddha, "Because of their evil karmas, these sinful people will

not be able to hear even the names of the Three Treasures during *asamkha kalpas*," and for those who have practiced the path he also states, "To those who have accumulated merits, and who are gentle and upright, and who see me living here, expounding the Dharma, . . . I say: 'It is difficult to see a Buddha.'"

Although I agree with the Buddha's words, I, as an ordinary man, sometimes feel like opposing these words. That is because in this modern age when the whole world is flooded with true and false information, it is hard to believe other people's words without solid proof, isn't it? We receive calls from telemarketers or scam e-mails everyday. Other people can deceive us at any time. Because of my doubts of others intentions, I sometimes feel bad when I approach the Buddha in my practice. I try not to complain about others but in this

life in this present society, being gentle and upright is a very difficult behavior to practice. I know that complaining to others about others will not cause anyone happiness.

At that time, one teacher told me, “When you write the term for “complain” in Chinese characters, the correct character should be 愚癡 (guchi) rather than 愚痴, which is usually used. The character 癡 (chi) means ‘a morbid doubt of others.’ This will lead to habitual complaining all the time.” He also said, “We do not doubt because we don’t believe. We doubt because we want to find something we can truly believe.” Maybe that is true. Because of this world with so many deceptions, people are seeking some teaching that we can surely believe and hold on to.

When I was rethinking the teacher’s advice, I recalled Nichiren Shōnin’s words. It was after he entered Mt. Kiyosumi at the age of twelve, and then he vowed to Bodhisattva Kokūzō, “Please make me the wisest man in Japan.” He relayed a memory of his youth, “Since all the people were praying and as I also prayed to Amitaba Buddha and recited his name, Namu Amidabutsu from my childhood, I raised one vow because I doubted something.” (Myōhō Bikuni Gohenji)

Our founder, Nichiren Shōnin had a wish, he struggled, had a doubt, then started walking a path toward his new faith. When I recall the founder’s life, I feel that I have received great power and encouragement



to live this life. Nichiren Shōnin thought that he could not be convinced with Pure Land Buddhism, which detests this present world, so he was awakened to the path to the Buddha’s true teaching. This thought of Nichiren Shōnin’s is the true meaning of “those who are gentle and upright.”

It had been four years since Nichiren Shōnin entered Mt. Kiyosumi, when he changed his childhood name, Yakuōmaro to Renchō, shaved his head and entered the priesthood. Having his head shaved, his master, Dōzen must have thought, “Renchō is a really wise boy. Now my life is easier because I have taken on this disciple.” Renchō was sixteen years old.

According to Nichiren Shōnin’s writings, Master Dōzen kept chanting Nembutsu and wishing for rebirth in the Pure Land of Utmost Bliss, which is thought to be a world where one’s soul goes after death. Nichiren Shōnin’s master could have caused Nichiren doubt about his faith because of his master reliance’s on the Nembutsu but Nichiren Shōnin had great respect for his master and always thought, “I want to find a way to save my master.” I suspect there must have been a big difference of thought between Nichiren Shōnin and his master; the weaving of the tapestry of

life was being created by Nichiren Shōnin and his master. What a beautifully diverse tapestry it was. Reflecting on this present

world we see that because people have been chasing materialistic fulfillment, they have accumulated negative deeds and they can hardly hear the Buddha’s voice. Furthermore, endless fights under pretense of religion are making the future of this human’s world a risky place. We can have doubt about the present world and if it is all right although we should not lock ourselves in the realm of complaining. If we sincerely seek a way to resolve a problem, we will surely find it. I believe that Ju “to receive” of Juji, represents that positive way of living.

## GLOSSARY

### Goshu Hosshi-gyō

Hosshi, Dharma teacher or practitioner of the Lotus Sutra should do five kinds of practice, *Juji* 受持 – receive and keep the Lotus Sutra, *Doku* 読 – read the Sutra, *Ju* 誦 – recite the Sutra, *Ge* 解 – understand the Sutra, *Setsu* 説 – expound the Sutra, and *Shosha* 書写 – copy the Sutra.

With having faith in the Lotus Sutra, studying the Sutra deeply, expounding the Sutra to other people and copying the Sutra by hand, we are able to adorn and purify our six sense-organs (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind) with these merits. (The Lotus Sutra Ch. 19, Murano, p. 269) Also in Ch. 21 of the Lotus Sutra, the Bodhisattvas sprung up from underground.

# 2nd Workshop on Nichiren Buddhism was held at Nichiren Buddhist International Center

## March 10-12, 2006

▼ 8 people attended the workshop instructed by three ministers.



**T**he Nichiren Buddhist International Center held 2nd Workshop on Nichiren Buddhism from March 10 to 12 with 8 attendants from all over North America. They practiced and studies intensely how to perform daily service at home, teaching of the Lotus Sutra, life of Nichiren Shōnin and his teaching. Every attendant enjoyed the program so much and hope come back again. Here is a report from one of the attendants.

### My Experience at the Workshop Mike Barrett

I was fortunate to be able to attend the 2nd Workshop on Nichiren Buddhism, held at the Nichiren Buddhist International Center in Hayward, CA. The experience was enriching and fulfilling, and I met new friends and people I had known only online, as well as seeing old friends again.

People began arriving Thursday eve-

ning although the conference registration began Friday morning at 11. After registration, we sat down to lunch together, and participants got to know each other over sandwiches and soda. Rev. Akahoshi reminded us to enjoy the sodas and spicy food, as we would be on a monastery diet for the duration of the workshop – no spicy foods, no coffee, no sodas, and so on. We were introduced to the Workshop instructors: Rev. Ryuken Akahoshi, Rev. Chishin Hirai and Rev. Masanori Mitomo. They would be our guides through many of the practices of Nichiren Buddhism this weekend.

Our schedule was quite full; up before 6am to prepare the day's altar offerings, then morning service at 6. Cleanup of the Center followed while breakfast was being prepared. We ate all of our meals together, offering the prayer before meals and then enjoying simple but nourishing food. Various practices and presentations followed, with evening service before supper and scheduled activities concluding around 9pm. There was time for conversation and sharing as well.

We enjoyed a number of presentations. Rev. Mitomo spoke on prayer beads (juzu), their significance and symbolism, and the ways they are held. Rev. Akahoshi talked about the Transmission of the *Lotus Sutra* (both the general and the specific) and how that relates to our practice, or how we who are practicing Buddhism today fit into the words of the sutra itself. Rev. Hirai told us about Nichiren Shōnin and the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, one of his most important letters. He presented some information I hadn't heard before such as a timeline correlating historical events in Japan, China and Europe for the periods before, during and after Nichiren's life. Rev. Hirai also discussed Nichiren's writings and

provided a list of those which have been authenticated. He turned finally to the Rissho Ankoku Ron and its significance, both in Nichiren's time, and how it relates to us today. This was helpful, as it can sometimes be hard to find the relevance of something written over 700 years ago. Later, we heard a talk on Nichiren doctrine presented by Rev. Akahoshi. He clarified Nichiren's five comparisons, the formal methods Nichiren used to (1) decide that the Lotus Sutra was Śākyamuni's highest teaching, and (2) to derive the correct practice for the Latter Age of the Declining Dharma.

We spent much of our time in the main hall (Hondo), where we learned service manner, or etiquette. We practiced different types of services, focusing mainly on morning and evening service; learning the bell strokes and how to keep time on the mokusho (wood drum). We performed a shodaigyo (meditation) service and learned how to sit still while meditating. We practiced playing the fan drum (taiko) and learned several different patterns including some two-stick beats for larger drums. We chanted all of Chapter 16 and the verse sections of Chapter 21 and Chapter 25, using the ichi-ichi mon-mon technique. This is not only an effective way to learn sutra recitation, but is also a very satisfying one as it sounds almost like a meditation.

We also practiced two different forms of writing meditation: shabutsu (copying the image of the Buddha) and shakyo (copying the Sutra). Kuon-ji made copies of their water-mirror portrait of Nichiren available for our shabutsu practice, the first time this has occurred outside of Mt. Minobu. For shakyo, we practiced writing the



▲ *Attendants practiced chanting the Lotus Sutra*

▼ *Shabutsu practice made the attendants concentrate on tracing Nichiren Shōnin's image.*



Odaimoku in kanji. Rev. Akahoshi reminded us to approach this as a meditation, rather than as an assignment to be completed as quickly as possible. I was able to immerse myself in both of these practices. I don't usually think of writing as a meditation, but I learned differently during this weekend.

Finally, we held a closing service to officially end the workshop. There was conversation and sad goodbyes. All of the participants had a very moving experience, and we all hope to be able to meet again soon for more practice together.

# Prison Missionary

## Buddha nature is being cultivated behind the bar.

**Shami Myokei Caine-Barrett**

Texas has the largest prison system in America. The state's Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ) is located in Huntsville, home to nine state prisons. The oldest prison is the Walls Unit, a maximum security unit which has gained notoriety as the location of Texas' famously-frequent executions.

A little over two years ago, Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Texas (NBSTX) became part of a support system for an inmate sangha at the Walls Unit, the only Buddhist sangha in the state. The sangha practiced a variety of teachings and were quite eager to learn more, but it was quite difficult to share the teachings as the TDCJ is a Christian-dominated system with little tolerance or understanding for other religions. It had taken the men nearly seven years of legal struggles to form a Buddhist group. Our efforts to share the dharma were often hampered by the system and the variety of approaches to Buddhism within the group forced us to continuously focus on basic Buddhist concepts.

Within a year, NBSTX began to support the formation of a sangha at the Pack Unit in Navasota with 12 individuals eager to practice Nichiren Buddhism. Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer gave the sangha an omandala which must be brought into the unit for every visit because there is presently no place for a permanent altar. We have established a Buddhist library with a focus on Nichiren Buddhism, including DVDs, CDs and VHS tapes. We have also established a good working

relationship with Chaplain Nichols, who is quite dedicated to facilitating religious practice.

We were surprised to learn that the men did not normally interact unless they lived in the same dorm, worked together, or passed each other in the hall. The ability to meet, discuss the dharma, and share experience would provide opportunities to deepen understanding of the dharma and strengthen bonds of friendships. Yet, the men were not able to meet on a regular basis since volunteers were not available during the week. This became an issue of contention for the men because other groups could meet without volunteers.



The group soon became a battleground as differences arose about how to handle the situation. Eventually, the group split and those who decided to pursue grievance path left the sangha. The remaining members vowed to practice to reveal the power of the dharma in their lives. At every meeting, we discussed the necessity of taking personal

responsibility and for forgiving ourselves for negative causes made in the past. The results were wonderful!

By November, 2005, the men were meeting on a regular basis and were able to practice together. Every meeting brings new visitors to learn about the dharma and the spirit that drives the sangha members.

On March 5, 2006, the dream of an all-day intensive at the Pack Unit facility was realized. This was the first all-day intensive ever to be held behind bars in Texas. Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer, Shami Myokei Caine-Barrett, Mike Barrett, Mary Aycock, Christie Carrington, and Craig Lira facilitated shakyo practice and spirited discussions about Nichiren Shōnin and the Lotus Sutra. We were able to observe the powerful impact of the Hokke Sembo service and Lotus Sutra blessing as the participants struggled to contain their emotions. One of the unit members also received his ofuda during the closing ceremony.

The result of dedicated practice and study have been revealed in the lives of these men as they faced their obstacles with great courage. Chaplain Nichols has been an important ally as he is now working to gain formal approval allowing us to use a portable altar with all the offerings. As NBSTX continues to receive requests from inmates all over Texas eager to learn more about the Lotus Sutra, we hope to expand the meaning of what it means to be a Buddhist behind bars and to ensure access to Nichiren Shōnin's Buddhism.

# The Lotus Sutra for children

by Rev. Kōge Matsumoto Translated by Rev. Shōkai 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.)

## VOLUME 2: "JOHON" OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

### ~ Chapter 13 ~

#### REUNION OF THE ETERNAL SPIRITS

Listening about his previous lives, Maitreya recalled events in his past lives and felt a yearning for them, saying joyfully, "That was right! That was it!" Listening to the conversation between Maitreya and Manjusri, the congregation on Mount Sacred Eagle also recalled their past lives. A long time ago in their past lives, they surrounded

the Buddha and listened to His teachings. They were so joyful to hear the Dharma, and their eyes were filled with tears.

"How happy we were that we were able to hear directly from the Buddha. Our minds were cleansed, and there was no more suffering. We were able to be so peaceful! If it is possible, we wish to be born again to listen to the Buddha directly from Him." Thus, they remembered their wishes in the past.

That was the reason the innumerable living beings were here on Mount Sacred Eagle now. Their wishes were answered. They realized the relation from the past to the present.

At last, Buddha Śākyamuni is going to expound the sutra of the Great Vehicle called the *Innumerable Teachings, the Dharma for Bodhisattvas, the Dharma Upheld by the Buddhas*, in short the *Lotus Sutra*.

Your heart is full of feeling, isn't it! Soon it is going to start! But not until the next volume.



By the way, have you ever thought that you have met your mother and father a long, long time ago in the past? Have you ever seen your good friends, teachers, relatives and people around you from long ago? You might have seen them before. Therefore, the greeting words when you meet someone for the first time should be "Glad to see you again!" instead of "How do you do?"

It is said that human beings have lived on earth for three million years. Such a long duration! People on the earth who lived during a particular time are somehow related to us. Everyone has a relationship with certain people and places in the past. We are friends from long ago. Therefore, if we help each other and work hard to establish peace, Peace on Earth must become reality. No war will happen on earth if we work hard together.



## VOLUME 3: EXPEDIENTS OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

### ~ Chapter 1 ~

## BUDDHA ŚĀKYAMUNI OPENS HIS EYES

The congregations on Mount Sacred Eagle were gods, deities, bodhisattvas, Buddha's disciples, kings, countless human beings and non-human beings. They were putting their hands in *gassho* and silently watching the Buddha with breathless interest after they listened to the conversation between Maitreya Bodhisattva and Manjusri Bodhisattva about the ray of light emitted from the Buddha's forehead.

"What is the Buddha Śākyamuni going to expound? How is it important for us? How wonderful will it be?" Their hearts leaped with joy.

Thereupon the Buddha emerged quietly from his meditation and said to Sariputra, "The Number One Wisdom Disciple:"

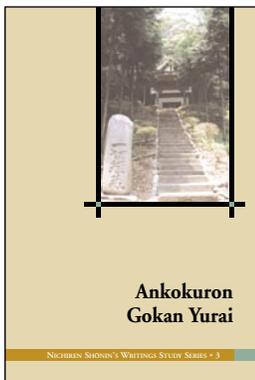
"You waited for me to talk, but the One and Only Truth in the Universe is too difficult for the people to understand. It is difficult even for Sariputra, my wisest disciple, to understand. Those who understand the truth are only the people who are obedient, gentle and sympathetic and who have a compassionate mind like the Buddha's."

"Sariputra, because it is too difficult for anyone to understand, I have not taught the truth for over 40 years. Instead, I taught various teachings that were easy to understand depending on each individual, place and

situation according to the capacities of all living beings. When I attained Enlightenment, I could read people's minds. Seeing with my Buddha wisdom, all people were selfish and ignorant. Because their minds were filled with dust and dirt, they thought about only their benefit. They were twisted in their nature. They were nervous and easily upset. They had no compassion for others, just like animals. Thus, I thought they could not understand the One and Only Truth in the Universe at all."



## BOOKS



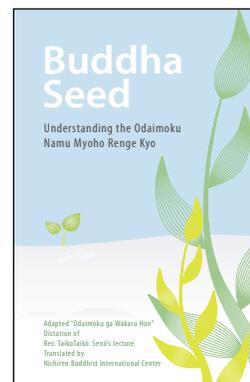
### Study Series of Nichiren Shōnin's Writings No. 3 – *Ankokuron Gokan Yurai* is published

Nichiren Buddhist International Center has published No. 3 of The Study Series of Nichiren Shōnin's Writings, *Ankokuron Gokan Yurai*.

Nichiren Shōnin wrote the *Rissho ankoku-ron* (*Treatise on Spreading Peace Throughout the Country by Establishing the True Dharma*). In this work he made predictions. Having experienced disasters such as the great earthquake in the first year of the Shōka Era (1257), Nichiren Shōnin predicted in

this writing that there would be domestic disorder and a foreign invasion in the near future without fail. In eight years, it turned out to be exactly as he predicted when an emissary arrived with a state letter from the Mongol Empire. Nichiren Shōnin then wrote a letter to an influential member of the Kamakura Shogunate, reminding him of the prediction he had made in the *Risshō Ankoku-ron*. This letter is known to us as the *Ankoku-ron gokan yurai*, or the reason why writing *Risshō Ankoku-ron*.

Please ask your local Nichiren Buddhist temple, church, or sangha to get your copy, or check NBIC website at [www.nichiren-shu.org](http://www.nichiren-shu.org) and click books & supplies.



### A New Book "Buddha Seed – Understanding the Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" will be available soon.

Nichiren Buddhist International Center will release a new book, "Buddha Seed – Understanding the Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" in April.

This book explains the meaning and significance of the Odaimoku (Sacred Title) of the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma (*Saddharma Pundarika Sutra*). A more complete understanding requires a brief exploration and an examination of several foundational issues such as the beginnings of Buddhism based on the specifics of the life of Śākyamuni as well as his teachings. Please check NBIC website sometime late in April.

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