

THE BRIDGE

The Nichiren Buddhist International Center

29490 Mission Blvd.
Hayward, CA 94544

Telephone: (510) 690-1222

Fax: (510) 690-1221

Web site: www.nichiren-shu.org

E-mail: NBIC@nichiren-shu.org

No. 51 / 2006 • Autumn

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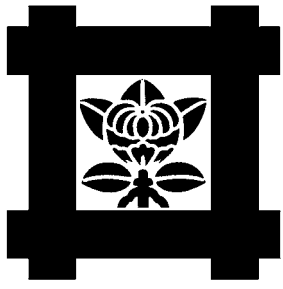


ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

(April - August, 2006)

Lynda Caine-Barrett, Hiroko Matsuda, Lionel Riley,
Roger Brokaw, Kazuye Kato, Ronald Funt, George
Jeffus, Klang Temple (Malaysia), Rev. Shokei Stephence,
Erin Templeton, Beatrice Mikami, Rev. Junryo
Miyazawa, Rev. Ryuji Ito

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THE WORLD OF THE ODAIMOKU – PART 15

The Motivation to uphold (Part II of “Juji” 受持)

Rev. Jun-ichi Nakamura
Illustration by Hiroshige Katsu

I mentioned previously that “ju” 受 refers to one’s feeling of simply accepting the Buddha’s teaching. This time, I would like to touch upon the character “ji” 持. “ji” does not only mean “to hold”; rather I would prefer one to judge this character to mean “to uphold”.

In a letter to one of his followers, Shijō Kingo, Nichiren Shōnin wrote, “It is simple to receive, but difficult to uphold. As such, upholding (the Buddha’s teaching) is the way to Buddhahood.” Ever since I was a child, I had been easily enticed and just as easy to lose interest in something. Whenever I came across something novel, I would get excited and pour everything into it; however, not once have I any recollections about it lasting for any period of time. Thus, was I surprised when I read the phrase above. I felt that I was being scolded by Nichiren Shōnin: “that’s why you can’t gain enlightenment!”

Perhaps, Shijō Kingo felt the same way when he read this letter seven hundred years ago. Although the original copy of this letter no lon-



ger exists, it can be assumed that Nichiren Shōnin took up his brush in Mt. Minobu and wrote this letter when he found out that Mr. Shijō had been diffident about his faith. As a matter of fact, the letter begins with “shikyō nan-ji no koto” (About shikyō nan-ji). *Shikyō nan-ji*, meaning “the difficulty of retaining the Sutra”, is a verse from the eleventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra, titled Beholding the Stupa of Treasures. Most are familiar with this verse as we usually chant this after chanting the Odaimoku. Summarizing the letter, we can know

that Mr. Shijō complained, “despite the fact that we were taught that those who keep the Odaimoku will gain peace in this life as well as happiness after death, why then have we experienced great calamities since last year?” In response to this, Nichiren Shōnin wrote, “let me dispel your doubts,” and proceeded to explain the difference between “ju” and “ji”. And to urge Mr. Shijō on, Nichiren Shōnin also wrote, “those who behold this sutra will certainly be met with hardship, so proceed with this in mind.” How did Mr. Shijō feel about this?

Shijō Kingo could be described as one who was rather enthusiastic. So much so, that Mr. Shijō along with his brother had gone so far as to pledge to die alongside Nichiren Shōnin when Nichiren was met with his most trying ordeal at Tatsunokuchi. Nichiren Shōnin has written saying, “that the greatest thing that I would never forget, no matter what world I was to be sent, was how the both of you held on to your reins while crying in despair when I was to be beheaded”(Sushun Ten’no Goshō). Could something bother one so determined as Shijō Kingo?

Mr. Shijō was torn between following the leader of the Hōjō family who had persecuted his teacher, Nichiren Shōnin, or forsaking all to choose a life of faith. There is no doubt that he was extremely anxious about being trapped between these choices. In actuality, I believe that he was unwavering in his choice. But, what comes to mind in these situations is that we want to hear our teacher’s voice. Mr. Shijō may have needed a tender expression of encouragement at that point in time.

In the Jiga-ge (verses from the sixteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra: Duration of the Life of the Tathagata), are two words, “katsugō” 渴仰 and “renbo” 恋慕. “katsugō” refers to the direness with which one calls upon the Buddha for salvation just as a very thirsty person frantically longs for just a drop of water. “renbo” refers to the pain of loving and yearning for the Buddha. I think Mr. Shijō’s feelings portray these words of the sutra exactly. And, it makes me want to exclaim “of course” in affirmation, to Nichiren Shōnin’s responsive reply. If one is told as Shijō Kingo was, that, “If your transgressions are so deep that you must go to hell, and no matter



how much I, Nichiren, am persuaded by Śākyamuni Buddha to become a Buddha, I will forego this, and go to hell instead,” such a person would be so encouraged as to drum courage by a hundred-fold, nay, perhaps by a thousand or ten thousand times.

Even after this letter, Mr. Shijō would experience the hardship of having his fief repossessed by his lord because of his faith. His lands, however, were later returned as they once were, along with some new plots of land—quite seeming perhaps for one who was so stubborn. Here, one can only imagine the joy upon Nichiren Shōnin’s face. Almost concurrently, though, did the Shogunate hold persecutions in Atsuwara of Suruga, in which some believers were even martyred. Thus, Nichiren Shōnin’s feelings at the time were probably of bitterness. Appropriately, it was none other than Nichiren Shōnin who was living *shikyō nan-ji*, the difficulty of retaining the Sutra with his flesh. It is a motive power of strong determination to uphold the teaching of the Sutra that we share sufferings with people in times of hardship as well as joy in their happy time.

In the present age as well, I often hear that “continuation creates strength”. We must accept the teachings of the Buddha to gain the strength to live today. Why? Because, therein, does Nichiren Shōnin’s true hope lie.

GLOSSARY

Shijō Kingo

(also known as Shijō Yorimoto):

A Samurai of the Kamakura area. At the age of twenty-seven, he pledged his faith to Nichiren Shōnin and became a believer of the Lotus Sutra. That Nichiren Shōnin’s most famous thesis, the Kaimoku-Shō (written in February of the ninth year of the Bunei Period, 1272), was first sent before all others to Mr. Shijō was not just that he was a central figure among the followers of Nichiren Shōnin in Kamakura, but also a testament to his knowledge of and his deep faith in Nichiren Buddhism.

Atsuwara Hōnan

(Atsuwara Persecution):

Refers to persecutions experienced by Nichiren Shōnin’s followers in Atsuwara (of present Fuji City in Shizuoka Prefecture) in the second year of the Kōan Period (1279). Nikkō and his disciples, who quickly amassed a following of disciples and believers, of which many were farmers, were pitted against a group consisting of Genyo of the Tendai Shu and Gyōchi and his followers of the Jōdo Shu. The head priest of Ryūsenji Temple, Gyōchi, took custody of twenty farmers including such as Atsuwara Jinshiro, who were under the propagation of Nikkō’s disciples, Nisshū and Nichiben, and sent them to Kamakura, charging them with being strong believers of the Lotus Sutra, and leaving them under the authority of Taira-no-Yoritsuna, the supervisor of the Samurai Quarters to confiscate their rice paddies.

Nichiren Shōnin petitioned their innocence and thus their release. Alas, however, they were met with extremely severe sentences. Three people including Jinshirō were beheaded, others were imprisoned, and Nisshū and Nichiben were banished to Shimofusa. It is said that Jinshirō and his peers protested Yoritsuna’s coercion and died chanting the Odaimoku.

Seminar for Nichiren Shū ministers on *Risshō Ankoku Ron* was held at the Headquarters

A new Nichiren Shū General Campaign, “Risshō Ankoku, Odaimoku Kechien” campaign has been started since April, 2005. “Risshō Ankoku” refers to spreading peace throughout the country by establishing the True Dharma. “The country” does not necessarily mean any specific country, but rather the whole world or even the whole universe. In other words, the focus of the “Risshō Ankoku” campaign is outside of the Nichiren Shū to spread peace throughout the world. “Odaimoku Kechien” refers to the creation of a relationship with the Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, to awaken ourselves as well as others to the Odaimoku. The “Odaimoku Kechien” campaign is, in other words, focused inside of ourselves.

The Nichiren Buddhist International Center (NBIC) held a seminar for Nichiren Shū ministers working outside of Japan on *Risshō Ankoku Ron* to understand the purpose of this General Campaign to spread the Odaimoku throughout the whole world. In the afternoon of May 22 there were about 30 ministers gathering at the Nichiren Shū Headquarters to listen to Rev. Jun’ichi Nakamura’s lecture. Rev. Nakamura is a well-known minister who has written articles for NBIC’s newsletter, Bridge.

Rev. Nakamura talked about Buddhism in general saying, “Buddhism is not a teaching to control a country but



one that assimilates into a country and helps the country to be independent. Therefore, it makes sense that Buddhism has changed its form depending on the country such as witnessed in India, China, Korea and Japan. We expect true missionaries of the Lotus Sutra to arise in each of your country.”

He also talked about “Risshō Ankoku,” saying, “When we think about ‘Risshō Ankoku,’ we should think globally ‘Spreading Peace throughout the **Whole World**’ and on a personal level, ‘Spreading Peace throughout **My Family**,’ by establishing the True Dharma. And they should be based on the idea of ‘Spreading Peace

throughout one’s **Mind**.’ It is important that we should be saved by having faith in the True Dharma, the Lotus Sutra so that we can possess a peaceful mind. We should try to make the world peaceful with the True Dharma.” In terms of process, Rev. Nakamura talked about *Shakubuku* with explaining, “Shakubuku is not to convert someone’s policy by force. The true meaning of Shakubuku is to point out one’s incorrect view of things and to awaken him to his inherent Buddha-nature. Buddha-nature, however, merely represents a potential to achieve enlightenment. It is necessary to plant a Buddha seed, that is the Odaimoku in the ground of Buddha-nature and raise the great

Professor Takashi Nakao presented a lecture on Nichiren Shōnin at NBIC



Professor Takashi Nakao, Ph. D. in Japanese History at Rissō University visited the Nichiren Buddhist International Center (NBIC) on April 6 and gave a lecture on the Life of Nichiren Shōnin. Prof. Nakao supervised the production of “Nichiren - A Practitioner of the Lotus Sutra,” a DVD documentary covering Nichiren

that the NBIC has invited a lecturer from Japan. In addition to teaching at the Rissō University in Tokyo, Prof. Nakao is currently the President of the “Academic Society of Ancient Documents of Japan”. He is also a council member for the Cultural Asset of Chiba Prefecture as well as chief researcher of Myōjōji Temple of Hakui

Shōnin’s life based on historical materials and newly discovered facts. In this session, Prof. Nakao showed the DVD to an audience of twenty for three hours with a question & answer session at the end. Beautiful pictures of Nichiren Shōnin’s life through out the DVD entertained the audience.

This opportunity represents the first time

in Ishikawa Prefecture. He was also formerly a member of the Council of Cultural Asset of the Agency for Cultural Affairs among many other committees.

During the question & answer session, many questions were brought up, such as one on “Jōei Shikimoku, the Law of Jōei, prohibited the killing of a clergy. Nichiren Shōnin was about to be killed at Tatsunokuchi, but was he not a clergy approved by the Kamakura Shogunate?” “Nichiren Shu is one of the major Buddhist orders in Japan. How has it been able to maintain such a strong following in the community?” He answered all the questions in detail and also talked about his new discoveries in his research, drawing the audience’s interest.

The DVD, “Nichiren - A Practitioner of the Lotus Sutra,” is now in the planning stage of being converted into English in the near future.

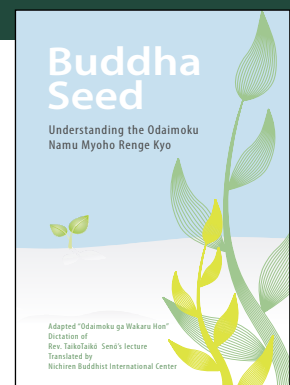
BOOKS

“Buddha Seed – Understanding the Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo”

Since April 28, 1253, when our founder, Nichiren Shōnin, first recited the Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, at Asahigamori on Mt. Kiyosumi, followers have been chanting the Odaimoku with faith in the Eternal Buddha Sakyamuni and chanting the Lotus Sutra. Chanting the Odaimoku is the core practice of Nichiren Buddhism, and many have wondered how people can be saved or reach Buddhahood by chanting the Odaimoku.

The Nichiren Buddhist International Center is pleased to publish Buddha Seed: Understanding the Odaimoku, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo to fully explain the Odaimoku and how it can help save people from suffering. This book is derived from Odaimoku ga wakarū hon, a collection of lectures by Rev. Taiko Seno, based on the Lotus Sutra and the writings of Nichiren Shōnin.

The book is available through NBIC web site for \$7.00 plus shipping & handling fee.



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 3: EXPEDIENTS OF THE LOTUS SUTRA

~ Chapter 2 ~

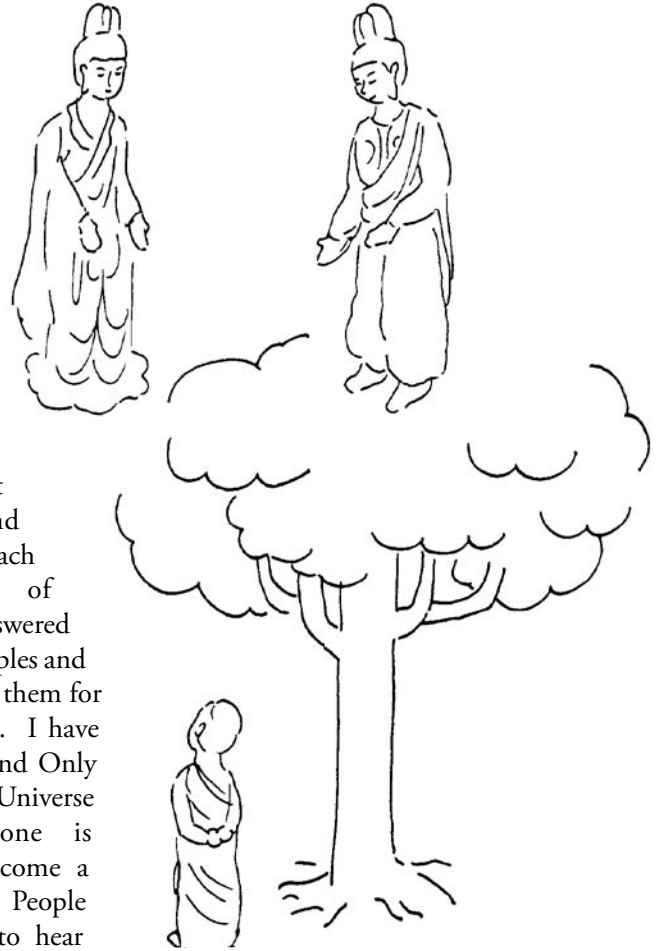
THE WORRYING BUDDHA

“Thinking about it, I sighed and looked at the sky. Sariputra! I put my hands behind my back and went around a bodhi tree many times while looking at the stars. ‘What should I do? How can I save these people? I wish to save them all, but nobody will understand the teaching of the truth.’ While I was walking around the tree, a good idea came to my mind.”

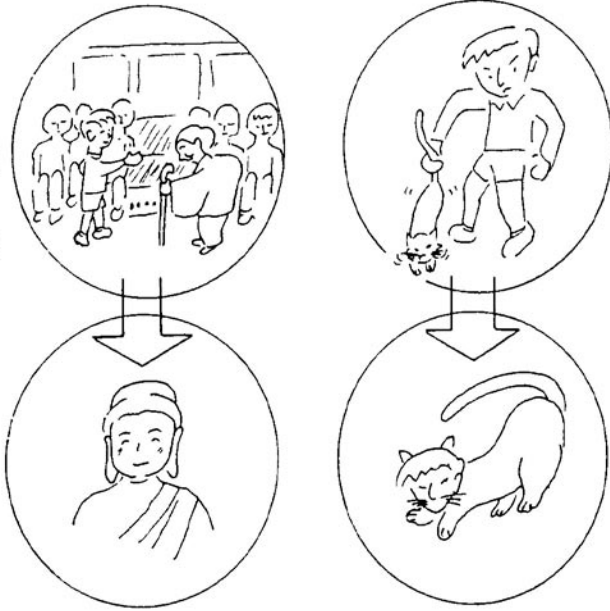
“At that time I heard a heavenly voice: ‘You really have come upon a good idea. That is right! Do as your mind tells you! People who are crooked, twisted and selfish in their mind are suffering

and worrying. Try to release their suffering and worries. Lead them to understand Buddha Dharma little by little. Have them be obedient to your teachings. Lead them with various stories of parables, similes and expedients!”

“Thus, I have taught various teachings and parables according to each individual’s capacity of understanding. I answered questions from my disciples and followers and consulted them for the last forty odd years. I have not revealed the One and Only Truth in the Universe that everyone is able to become a Buddha. People rejoiced to hear my easy teachings and understand them whenever they were in trouble or suffering. They were now obedient, gentle and sympathetic with a compassionate mind like the Buddha’s.”



However, Sariputra, I will say no more because the Dharma attained by the Buddha is the highest Truth, rarely heard and difficult to understand. For the reality of all things is quite different in comparing them with the teachings I have expounded so far. Only the people who have a compassionate and gentle mind like the Buddha will understand the Truth.”



~ Chapter 3 ~

THE TEN SUCHNESSES

One's look, such as the size of their eyes, the height of their nose and the shape of their mouth is not determined by their parents. One's look is determined by one's karma in their former lives. There are all kinds of children, such as cute, ugly, gentle or mean. Some people are strong while others are weak. There are skillful people and untalented ones. This is all caused by themselves in the past. It is not others who have made you strong or weak. You caused your own characters, features and abilities. Your characters, features and abilities are not caused only in this life but also in your many past lives. Because of the causes created by you in the past, various conditions meet with the causes in the present; a good result will come up or an unexpected bad thing may happen in the future. Therefore, whether one had good causes in the past or bad, the result

appears in this life. Moreover, whether your life style is good or bad or whether you have lived in a good manner or not, you will be affecting your future. Therefore, it is a mistake to think that it's all right as long as it is good now, or that it's all right as long as I am joyful now, or

it's all right if only I am happy, or that nothing exists after one's death.

These ideas are all wrong. Past lives are important, but the present life is much more important because the present life will affect the future life; the past, the present and the future are all important. In other words, how we live everyday is important. That is the teaching of the Ten Suchnesses.

“Therefore, if you follow Buddha's teachings as I have taught so far everyday, I shall expound for sure the One and Only Truth in the Universe that everyone is able to become a Buddha. I have taught for three different levels of people as follows: 1. “*hearer*” who practice by listening to my teachings, 2. “*private Buddha*” who practice by himself

in the natural world, 3. *bodhisattva* who practice to serve others by sacrificing himself. Thus, I have led many people step by step. The reason I expounded various teachings for forty odd years was to lead all people to the level of being compassionate, so that the people can work for others even by sacrificing themselves.”

