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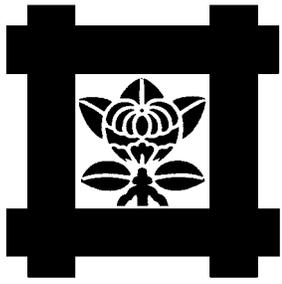
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The World of the Odaimoku

Article by Rev. Jun'ichi Nakamura
Illustrations by Hiroshige Katsu

Tale No.1 Nichiren Shonin's Vows

Welcome! Welcome to the world of Odaimoku, a world of hopes and dreams.

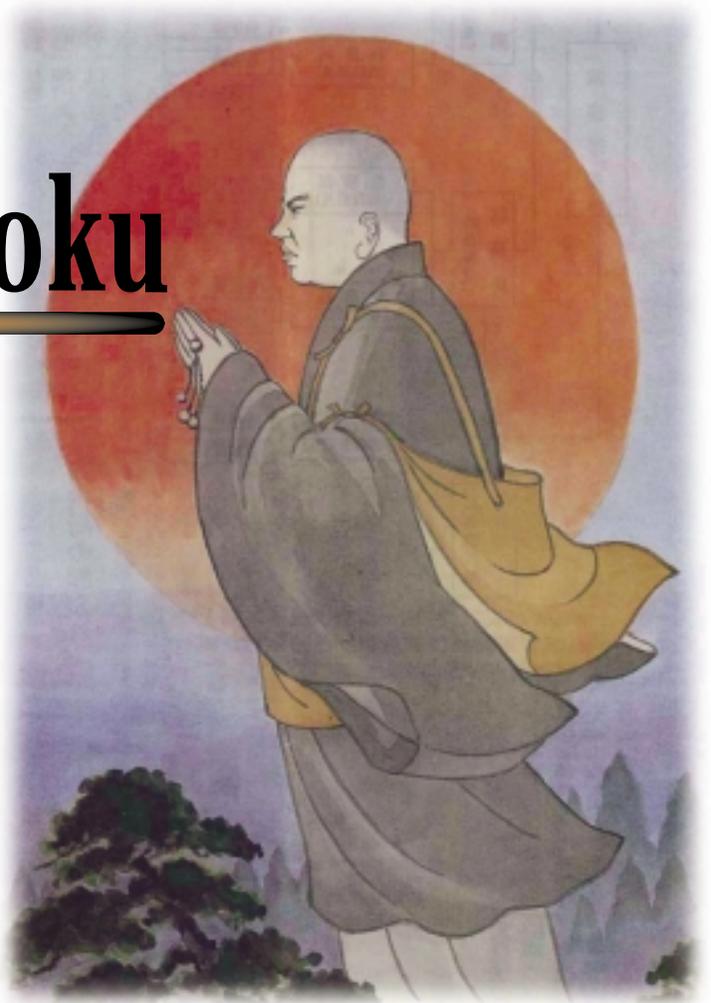
I'm going to be your guide. I will lead you to enjoy the world of the Odaimoku.

To begin with, I will talk about *The Lotus Sutra* and *Nichiren Shonin*.

We can not overstate that Nichiren Shonin and the Lotus Sutra are two inseparable entities. This series of articles *The World of the Odaimoku* strives to help you experience the world of Nichiren Shonin's experiences with the Lotus Sutra in your own life and heart.

Start by taking a glance at the photo in the middle of the page. 750 years ago was the time in which Nichiren Shonin stood up vowing to illuminate the darkness that has enveloped our world with the light of the Odaimoku.

On April 28th in the 5th year of Kencho (1253), a young priest stood atop Asahigamori on Mt. Kiyosumi in Kominato in the province of Awa (modern day Chiba Prefecture). He faced the sun as it rose above the Pacific Ocean and in a resilient voice, began chanting *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo...*



Nichiren Shonin
example shows us that
the Lotus Sutra can
save all people

The significance of Nichiren Shonin's
self-proclamation of being a *Chandala*

The young priest was none other than our Founder, Nichiren Shonin. He was 32 years old at the time and as he faced the ocean, his fervent desire to save his country and guide the people rode was released to the winds as it flew through the heavens.

He demonstrates that it is indeed the Lotus Sutra that embodies Sakyamuni Buddha's true teachings

Nichiren Shonin's hometown was situated next to the sea. In his writings, he mentions that he was born into this world to a family of fishermen,

Nichiren is the son of a fisherman from the Kataumi area of Tojo village within the Nagasa district of Awa Province, the 12th of 15 provinces located along the Tokaido.

There are many stories and explanations as to the origins and heritages of Nichiren Shonin's family, however let's follow his own sentiments according to his self-proclamation of being "born a *chandala* from a poor and humble family." The term *chandala* (untouchable) is the pronunciation of a Ghandaran term from ancient India that meant a person who kills other living beings as an occupation. According to the customs of ancient India, a *chandala* was a person from the lowest level that could not even be included within the caste system and was therefore, considered less than human.

However, such appalling class discrimination did not exist in Japan of the Kamakura Period. Nonetheless, by placing himself on the lowest of spheres in the caste system, Nichiren Shonin was demonstrating to us that the teachings of the Lotus Sutra could save all people because he had full confidence in Sakyamuni Buddha's true teachings.

The Buddha's true teachings in which Nichiren Shonin felt absolute confidence was Myoho Renge Kyo - the Lotus Sutra. In the third chapter, *Parables*, of the Lotus Sutra there is a phrase which states, "Now, this Triple World is my property. All living beings therein are my children."

The Triple World is the entire world in which we and everything else reside. This earth on which we live, is the realm that the Original Buddha, Sakyamuni, vowed to save. Therefore, all of the living beings within that world are just like the children of the Buddha. We sincerely hope to be able to awaken all the people to the fact that they are indeed the Buddha's children. We hope that

all beings will be able to live their lives to the fullest.

Nichiren Shonin who remonstrated with the Shogunate government undoubtedly felt the same thing deep within his own heart as he wrote the *Rissho Ankoku Ron (Treatise for Securing a Peaceful Nation through the Establishment of Correct Buddhism)*.

As he stood atop Asahigamori and look down at the shore, Nichiren Shonin must have recalled the days of his youth when he used to run up and down the coastline. He most probably thought of his parents who were still living there. He said to himself, "There is no honour in a monk who has not saved his own parents." and must have felt uneasy.

Accompanied by his father, he climbed Mt. Kiyosumi when he was twelve years old. When he was 16, he received the tonsure and received the Buddhist name of "Zeshobo Rencho." He recalled his vow of "I will master the teachings of Buddhism, become a Buddha and save the peo-

At this point, I would like to explain why Nichiren Shonin made these three particular vows. Nichiren Shonin's ideals embodied Sakyamuni, the Original Buddha of the Infinite Past's manner of living. Nichiren Shonin fully recognized that Sakyamuni Buddha was not only the sovereign of all living beings on this earth, but their teacher and parent as well. Nichiren Shonin embraced the great dream of becoming the pillar of the hearts of all the people throughout Japan and the world, the eyes to guide all humanity and a great ship to save innumerable beings.

The first head master of the Sapporo School of Agriculture (later became Hokkaido University), Prof. Clarke, used to encourage his students with his very famous "Boys, be ambitious." Nichiren Shonin stood up, however, with a great hope to destroy the innate darkness of all mankind during the age of *Mappo* (the Latter Age of the Dharma) .

Resolution atop Asahigamori

A light to destroy the innate darkness of all mankind during the age of *Mappo*

ple who have shown me favour" and the events during those days as if they were only yesterday.

Now is the time to simply believe and move forward as a child of the Buddha. His great determination of "I will become the pillar of Japan, I will become the eyes of Japan and I will become the great ship of Japan" swelled within his heart.

These resolutions are called the Three Great Vows of Nichiren Shonin and became an unchanging theme throughout his entire life. We consequently appointed this day as *Rikkyo Kaishu*, or the anniversary of the Founding of Nichiren Shu and the Establishment of Nichiren Shonin's Teachings. This is an auspicious day that embodies the very will of Nichiren Shonin and a history of 750 years.

One of Clarke's students and a Christian, Kanzo Uchimura, once made the following comments regarding Nichiren Shonin,

Nichiren faced the east and resonantly chanted "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo." The sea listened to him as he recited the Odaimoku. Underneath his feet lay the sound of the pounding waves of the sea roared back in agreement. The mountains listened to him as he recited the Odaimoku. The pine trees scattered throughout the mountainside behind him were like large and small harps that played in harmony to his prayers. He performed a solemn ceremony as he faced the universe and set forth his vows. He then went forward along his chosen path. Receiving assistance from the universe, he became larger than the world. He proclaimed his battle cry fully aware that the struggle from now on would be fierce.

Even though he himself was a Christian, Kanzo Uchimura praised the young priest Nichiren Shonin and his proclamation of his school of Buddhism.

The strength of resistance to his proclamation, however, was felt throughout Seichoji temple and on the very same day, he was forced to flee. From that time onward, Nichiren Shonin walked a path of continuous opposition and persecution.

On his way he returned home after a very long absence and after explaining the Lotus Sutra to his parents, they became his first converts and followers. Parents are really something to be profoundly appreciated.

Kanzo Uchimura (1861-1930): Born in Tokyo, a Christian missionary during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taisho (1912-1926) periods. He began his studies at the Tokyo Foreign Language School and in 1877 he met Prof. Clarke at the Sapporo School of Agriculture. In 1884, he traveled to the United States of America and after returning to Japan, became an instructor at the No. 1 Intermediate and High School (today, Tokyo University). Refusing to venerate the Imperial Decree on Education, he lost his job due to lese majesty. He publically criticized the *Zaibatsu* (large financially combined corporations of the era) for the mining pollution incident at the Ashio Mines and advocated no warfare during the Russo-Japanese War, publishing *Seisho no Kenkyu* (Bible Research) and propagated the ideal of a no-church form of Christianity. To introduce the Western society to Eastern culture and philosophy, he wrote the book *Daihyoteki Nipponjin* (Typical Japanese) in which he summarized the life of Nichiren Shonin as a religionist.

The Three
Great Vows:
Advance upon
the Journey
of Faith



Beginning of New Life with Nichiren-Shu

Lynda Caine-Barrett,
Houston, Texas

***“There is no greater happiness
for human beings than chanting
Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.”***

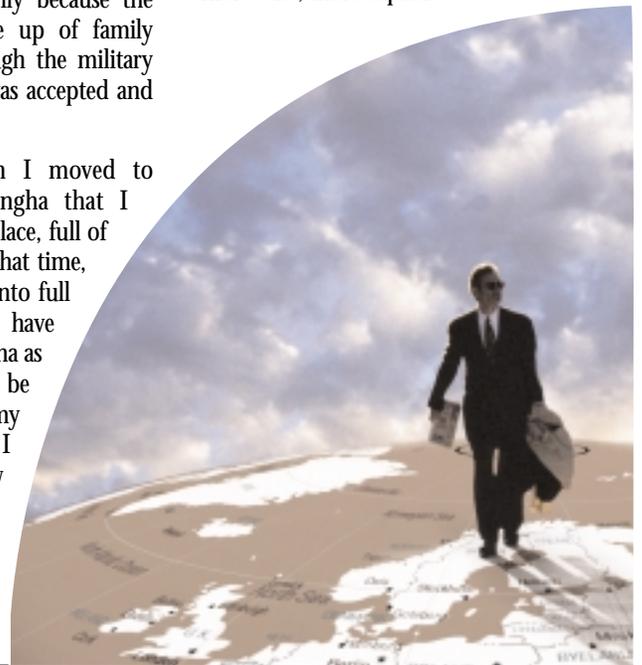
— Nichiren Shonin

For the more than 35 years I have been chanting daimoku, I firmly believed in the truth of this statement. For most of these years, I can truthfully say that I practiced diligently and with great focus on achieving each and every one of my goals in service to the dream of world peace. I came into the practice of Nichiren Buddhism full of hopes and dreams, a child of the new age, the dawning the age of aquarius. I was, even then, a rebel and I still am. Yet, I always longed for acceptance and a sense of belonging, especially since I am a product of a mixed ethnicity: African-American and Japanese. I never seemed to fit comfortably in either group. For awhile I found acceptance through my practice. This was primarily because the sangha I joined was made up of family friends and associates through the military community in El Paso. I was accepted and allowed to be a rebel.

Everything changed when I moved to Houston, Texas. The sangha that I encountered was an alien place, full of politics and procedure. At that time, my rebellious nature came into full blossom and I resolved to have nothing to do with this sangha as the only reason I seemed to be acceptable was the color of my skin. The first greeting I received was “Oh good, now we can shakubuku more black people!” I was highly offended and chose at that time to go my own way;

however, I was unable to continue my practice with any intensity or consistency alone. I returned when I found myself unable to overcome the things that occurred in my life while I was making plans to become something/someone wonderful.

I was a successful entertainer and had a great job; yet, it seemed I was never good enough. No matter what I did, there was always someone I perceived to be less qualified who either became my boss or got the better jobs. I just did not understand this; however, I assumed that the fault rested with my practice—it was not correct enough, intense enough, and my rebellious nature was the culprit. I determined to place my trust in my leaders and follow, follow, follow, especially as I have never practiced this way before. Little did I realize that I had totally sold myself down the proverbial river as I placed my life in the hands of people I believed to be more wise, more capable.



It worked for awhile. I was fortunate that the women I trusted were quite capable of guiding me through many precarious situations and I was quite successful in my endeavors. However, as these wonderful women either moved away or died, I found that my support system had crumbled. My father also died and I realized that I had to stand on my own and become more capable and independent. My women leaders had taught me well; I was able to overcome family relationship problems, get married, and have the child of my dreams. However, no one prepared me for people in my environment who were not able to deal with my growing independence and my increased capability and confidence.

I had always assumed that anyone could make the progress I had made in my life solely through the efforts of a dedicated practice and abundant daimoku. I learned that others did not feel this way and found myself dealing with individuals who tried to take shortcuts and not go

through the changes necessary to find success in their lives. This began a period of intense suffering in my life as these individuals attempted to fill the shoes of the wonderful women who had guided me previously.

In my mistaken earnestness, I chose to please everyone except myself. I wrung myself in knots trying to be the best leader and the best sangha member. Nothing I did satisfied anyone and everything I did was suspect; yet, I sacrificed everything to achieve the dream of world peace. I found very little support in my external environment and because I had no internal support, I was miserable. I was however, still highly successful in achieving goals and completing tasks, and thus was always welcomed as a dedicated worker bee who could not be trusted with real responsibility.

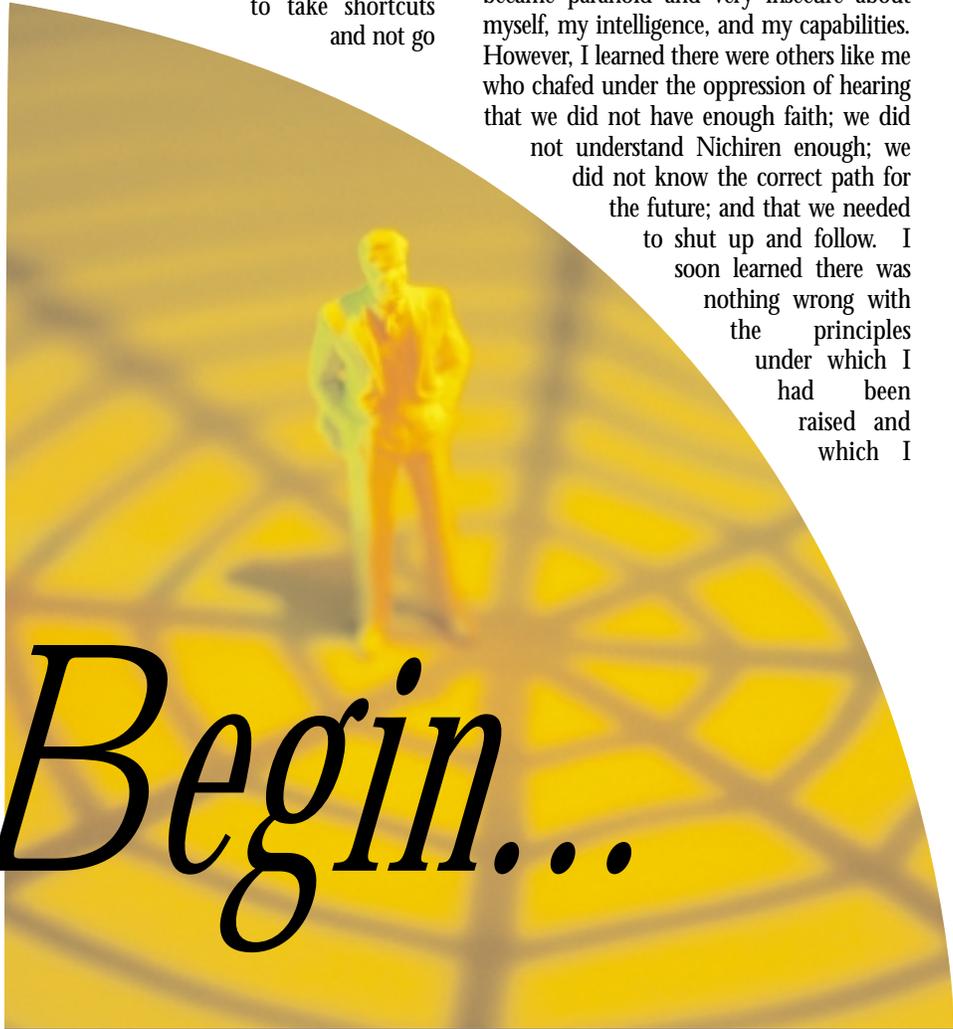
Because of the sangha culture, I did not speak about this with many people. To speak out was perceived to be a lack of faith. I became paranoid and very insecure about myself, my intelligence, and my capabilities. However, I learned there were others like me who chafed under the oppression of hearing that we did not have enough faith; we did not understand Nichiren enough; we did not know the correct path for the future; and that we needed to shut up and follow. I soon learned there was nothing wrong with the principles under which I had been raised and which I

expressed in my own life. Others even shared them. I came to understand that if I did not support myself, support who I truly am, then I would never find kindred spirits anywhere. I learned that my vision and path for the future had to be based upon my own sense of myself—that it was far better to be a failure at my own path than a success at someone else's path. The cost of all this suffering was that the joy of my practice disappeared and I found it difficult to recover.

My friends and I found ourselves gradually excluded from the main sangha and resolved to form our own. We supported each other; we cried together; we suffered all the guilt and shame of not being good enough—we were living in some strange nightmare. This took us about two and a half years after which we knew we needed a larger community of like-minded practitioners. We never gave up our practice of Nichiren Buddhism even as we found other non-Buddhist communities who welcomed us as if we were normal people.

When we connected with Nichiren Shu in 2001, it was quite startling. NONA President John Petry and Rev. Ryuoh Michael Faulconer of Portland came to visit us and it was a karmic fit—we were almost instantly a family, comfortable. I don't think there are any other individuals better suited to our natures than these two. They helped to bring us all firmly back to the reasons we began to practice in the first place—not to suffer, but to become happy. We were warmly embraced and cherished; we were also met with honesty and choices. It was a heady experience and most of us experienced a wild sense of vertigo as we each remembered what had happened when we trusted people before.

My long journey of personal suffering for not being good enough, for being unacceptable, for giving up my own power of choice to others has finally ended—as has that of my comrades in faith. I have come to accept myself and be more comfortable in my skin. I think I can also say that my friends and I have rediscovered our passion, our joy and even the 'sacredness' with which we approach our practice now. We took vows with Nichiren Shu on 21 April 2002 and marked this as the beginning of a brand new life. We will create new history with our lives.



Begin...

Odaimoku is spreading in the new area Brand New group, NICHIREN BUDDHIST SANGHA OF TEXAS was born



Rev. Ryuoh Michael Faulconer

Shortly after graduating from Shingyo Dojo, I was asked to visit a group of people in Houston Texas. The group had first contacted John Petry, who is the president of Nichiren Order of North America though e-mail. They wished to meet someone from the priesthood of Nichiren Shu and ask questions. Through correspondence with members of the Nichiren Shu on the web and the Nichiren Shu web sites, they had liked what they saw. John Petry and myself went to Houston to meet the group in the beginning of August, 2001. This was the start of the Houston Sangha. The group was very enthusiastic about the visit and wanted more. I have been visiting on a regular schedule since then. In October of 2001, a mini Dharma Conference was held and several of the members received temporary Omandalas. The group did Shodaigyo practice (the practice of chanting the Odaimoku), copied the Odaimoku and listened to lectures on Basic Buddhist Concepts and Practices of the Lotus Sutra. On April 21, 2002 thirteen people of the Texas group became official members of Nichiren Shu and received Omandala. The Nichiren Buddhist Sangha of Texas was born. The day the group took vows was very special. I am sure they will all remember it and treasure it in their hearts. Nichiren-Shu Headquarters in Japan donated a Omandala to the group for this special event. The Sangha has been busy since its beginning. They already have written bylaws and have started to spread the Odaimoku in their area. In June they hosted "Change Your Mind Day" in Houston. "Change Your Mind Day" was started nine years ago by Tricycle magazine in New York. It was originally started as a way for Buddhist to get together and meet one another and practice together. About two to three thou-

sand people show up in New York's Central Park for the event. Since its inception other cities have incorporated this idea and have started their Change Your Mind Day under Tricycle's tutelage. This was the first time Change Your Mind Day held in Houston. Even though it was small, I think the response was very positive. In the future It will be a big part of the Buddhist community of Houston. It was held in one of Houston's big parks next to the zoo. Several speakers were present at the Houston event from several Buddhist traditions. They talked about basic Buddhism and meditation practice. A yoga instructor helped everyone stretch out about half way through the program. I was the last presenter. Because the official rules say the speakers are to present a form of meditation, I had decided to do Shodaigyo practice. After talking about Odaimoku and Nichiren Shu, we chanted. It was wonderful and many people wanted to talk about their experience of Odaimoku for the first time. The whole event was five hours long. About thirty to fifty people were present at any given time during the event. Many of the people present exchanged phone numbers and want to help with next year's event. The Houston Sangha has started out very positive and eager to spread the Dharma. They meet on a regular basis to practice chanting and study the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Shonin's writings. They are very active in introducing new people to the practice. Each time I go down to see them, new faces are present. I go down to visit on a regular schedule of every other month. If you would like to learn more about the Houston group please visit their web site at <<http://www.nbstx.org/>> or you can write me, Rev. Ryuoh Faulconer at either <ryuoo@attbi.com> or at the Nichiren Buddhist Temple of Portland.

