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No. 38 / 2002 • Winter

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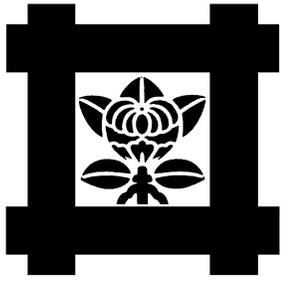
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT (July '02 – September '02)

Rev. Takashi Kiuchi, Mr. Rick Jorgensen,
Mrs. Valerie Stewart,
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THE WORLD OF THE ODAIMOKU - PART II

Becoming the Wisest Person in Japan

Article by
Rev. Jun'ichi Nakamura

Illustrations by
Hiroshige Katsu

When a new school year starts, everything seems resplendent, shining like a new elementary school student on his or her first day at school. Do you recall your first day at school?

Nichiren Shōnin probably experienced the same sort of thing when he was a child. When Nichiren Shōnin was 55 and while residing at Minobu, he wrote a letter to the priests of Seichōji Temple explaining that as a young lad, he had prayed to the Bodhisattva Kokuzo to become "the wisest man in Japan." Let's take a closer look at exactly what it means to become such a sage.

Young Yakuōmaro at
Seichōji Temple,
later Nichiren Shu Founder,
prays and makes a



Nichiren Shōnin was 12 years old during the first year of Tempuku (1233) when he first entered the temple school of Seichōji atop Mt. Kiyosumi. Just as any new student, he was most probably filled with dreams and high expectations.

Enshrined in the centre of the main hall of Seichōji Temple was a statue of Bodhisattva Kokūzo. The meaning of the name of this Bodhisattva signifies a limitless storehouse which holds great wisdom as vast as the sky. It is said that if someone prays to this Bodhisattva, one would be blessed with great fortune, virtue and wisdom. Would you like to pray to this Bodhisattva? However, prayers solely for one's own happiness and to succeed at the cost of others are not answered.

I recall a story that I once heard of a young boy who went home from school one day after successfully receiving one hundred points on an examination. The boy's mother asked her son, "how many other children in your class received 100 points?" The mother then encouraged her son rather than praising him to do his best and strive to become the best student in the class.

Vow to Bodhisattva Kokūzo

I am not sure if this story is true or not, however, it is a very probable situation in life, wouldn't you agree? In such a competitive society as we have today, people at times are moved to pray to achieve success in this manner and at any cost.

However, Nichiren Shōnin's prayers and vow to the Bodhisattva to become "the wisest man in Japan" was not such a trivial thing, wishing merely to succeed over others. To be a sage as the word suggests, means to become a person filled with knowledge and wisdom. It goes without saying that the wisdom that Nichiren Shōnin sought was the profound wisdom and insight of the Buddha, often abbreviated simply as Buddha Wisdom.

Let's examine the meaning of the term "Buddha Wisdom" in the *Comprehensive Buddhist Dictionary* by Hajime Nakamura which explains that wisdom signifies "being able to clearly see the true aspects throughout all matters of life, and complete the process of attaining enlightenment, together with the cognitive power to correctly view all matter while thoroughly fathoming the true principles behind them."

Interestingly enough, however, the simple term of *knowledge* (not wisdom) in the same Buddhist dictionary, is explained as signifying "to understand the blessings given by people." This does not mean, of course, that knowledge is something insignificant. The contrast was shown to illustrate that wisdom has a deeper meaning. Realizing this profound importance, Nichiren Shōnin must have surely prayed to Bodhisattva Kokūzo.

Buddhist storehouse of knowledge with the goal of searching for the heart or true teachings of the Buddha Sakyamuni.

Recalling the days of his youth, Nichiren Shonin wrote about his vow to Bodhisattva Kokūzo in the *Ho'on Jo (On Repaying One's Debt of Gratitude)*,

Among the various sutras, there surely must be one which is king. All of the ten and seven schools debate with each other as to which sutra rules supreme, but no one can reach a consensus. It is as though seven or ten men were all trying to govern a single nation as its sole monarch and as a result, leave the populace at large in constant turmoil. Wondering how to resolve this dilemma, I made a vow.

Nichiren Shonin's model was the Great Chinese Master T'ien T'ai (538-597). In 538, Japan found herself under the reign of Emperor Kinmei and witnessed the initial year of the official introduction of Buddhism to the nation. Already in China at this time, however, numerous sutras had made their way into that country and a variety of Buddhist schools had been formed which all contended with each other to become the leading school.

Within this historic background, the Great Master T'ien T'ai, sorted, classified and put into order all the sutras and established the Tendai Lotus school centered on the Lotus Sutra. T'ien T'ai's personal name was Chih-I or Chigi, but he was also referred to by the people of his time as "the Great Master and Sage."

I will discuss the doctrinal structure of this particular school with you later. However, whether it be the Great Master

from the time he was twelve years old until at 32, when he declared the Lotus Sutra to be the supreme teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha and established Nichiren Shu. This progress is most probably unparalleled in other people.

There is a phrase within the *Emergence from the Earth* chapter of the Lotus Sutra which reads, "Constantly make progress day and night." Nichiren used this passage in one of his writings to his many followers and believers, in a letter to Jonin Toki when he wrote,

[In pursuing their Buddhist faith and practice in order to attain Buddhahood,] Nichiren's disciples must shorten their sleeping hours at night and must not rest during the day, or else they will regret it for the rest of their lives.

In this letter, he strongly encouraged his followers to do their utmost in order to attain enlightenment. Otherwise, he reasoned, it would be difficult for their to meet their objective. However, this encouragement to strive to do our best is not the same egotistical thing as the mother pushing the child to win at all costs, no matter who might get passed over or even possibly hurt along the way.

We must all take sincerely to heart that the road to enlightenment is not an easy one, and they we must be prepared to meet with difficulties along the way. We must further point out that when one prays and makes a vow, if one fails to put forth any effort to attain that goal, no Bodhisattva, no matter how profoundly compassionate, can help you to accomplish your vow.



84,000 Doctrines in Buddhism

The sheer amount of teachings expounded by the Buddha was so voluminous that the subsequent compilations of the Buddha's words came to a total of 84,000 sutras. Each of these sutras contain its own unique message or teaching. Nichiren Shonin entered into this large

T'ien T'ai or Nichiren Shonin himself, both realized that it was indeed the Lotus Sutra that revealed the eternal true intent of Sakyamuni Buddha.

For Nichiren Shonin to come to this realization, it took him some 20 years

**20 years of Buddhist practice,
research and faith, Nichiren Shōnin masters
the teachings of Buddhism**

Raising his Voice together with the Great Master T'ien T'ai to declare that the Lotus Sutra is indeed the highest teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha

According to historical tradition, when Nichiren Shonin was 16 years old, he decided to formally enter the priesthood and took religious vows. At this time, his name was changed from Yakuōmaro to Renchō. He had already undergone strenuous Buddhist discipline and practice, but retired in the temple for a further 21 days of prayer and reflection.

When he then did achieve his goal, he composed a letter [in 1276] to the priests and other residents of Seichōji Temple in which he explained that he had experienced a most wondrous event in his life,

I received the great jewel of Buddha Wisdom from the living body of Bodhisattva Kokūzo.

He further spoke of his experience when he continued,

I had been praying to the Bodhisattva Kokūzo to become the wisest person throughout Japan. He must have felt compassion for me, because he presented me with a great jewel as brilliant as the morning star which I accepted and placed in my right sleeve.

Not a wooden statue, but a living form of the Bodhisattva. I wonder indeed what the Bodhisattva looked like. For someone such as myself who has never had such an experience, I can't imagine what the Bodhisattva could have looked like nor such an experience. However, one woman who often comes to my temple, once told me the following story. "When I sincerely chant the *Odaimoku* with all my heart, Nichiren Shonin smiles at me. It makes me feel very happy and appreciative."

Dai



I remember reading somewhere that Buddhist prayers and rites for Bodhisattva Kokūzo are performed when the morning star is visible. Furthermore, Sakyamuni Buddha attained enlightenment in the early hours of the morning, after viewing the morning star. It might be safe to say then, that Nichiren Shonin experienced something similar to Sakyamuni Buddha during that time.

Nichiren Shonin recalled many of his youthful experiences throughout his life. Nichiren Shonin himself then explained, "In order to repay Bodhisattva Kokūzo for the treasure that had been bestowed upon me, I have strove all my life to widely propagate faith in the *Odaimoku*, never once stopping nor abandoning my resolve."

Moku



Note:

The Great Master T'ien T'ai (538-597): Born in present day, China. He was a priest and founder of the Tendai School of Buddhism who carried out his activities in Hunan Province during the Liang, Chen and Zui Dynasties. He entered the priesthood at the age of 18. At 23 he practiced Lotus Samadhi meditation and attained enlightenment. When he was 38, he climbed Mt. T'ien T'ai and remained there, setting up the structure of Tendai Buddhism after he formalized his philosophy and actual practices. The Great Master T'ien T'ai was unique in that he was the first priest to try to unify all of Buddhism, based on the Lotus Sutra. His three major writings are *Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, *Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* and *Great Concentration and Insight* (Ch. *Fahua Hsuan'i*, *Fahua Wenchu* and *Hoho Chikuan*; Jp. *Hokke Gengi*, *Hokke Mongu* and *Maka Shikan*). These works outline Tendai thought and practice based on the philosophy of the Lotus Sutra. One might even go as far as saying that these major works represent the source for the essence of the Lotus Sutra Buddhism. Much of Nichiren Shonin's foundation in Buddhist doctrinal study came from Great Master T'ien T'ai, with his *The Three Major Writings* setting the groundwork for faith in the Lotus Sutra.

(Translated by Rev. Shoryo Tarabini)

Basics of Faith for all believers

We should live our lives in the same way Nichiren Shōnin, based on his experiences with the Lotus Sutra.



BUDDHISM IN AMERICA, PRESENT AND FUTURE

**Dr. Lewis Lancaster -
D.H. Chen Distinguished
Professor in Buddhist Studies,
University of California at Berkeley**

Buddhism was perhaps the first world religion. It was the first to break away from its cultural homeland and spread far and wide. As it did so, it transcended language, geographic limitations, religious traditions, and ethnic identifications. In this way, Buddhism was able to spread from the Ganges Valley to East Asia where it assimilated into the local patterns of culture. Later, it also spread along the sea routes to Southeast Asia. We can call this a "portable sanctity." There were several aspects to this portability. First, the founder was a wandering ascetic who moved about the Ganges Valley. He is said to have delivered his message in the local dialects and to have indicated that the true teaching about the world as it really is, can always be expressed in any language. The monks who followed in the lineage of the Buddha were also "portable." They could travel without losing their authority and without being polluted by contacts they made with foreigners. The relics of the Buddha, the physical remains after the cremation of his body could also be transported far and wide and could the images made of him. Therefore, we can see that early Buddhism was portable in the sense that the founder, the monks, the teaching, relics and images were able to be moved from place to place without losing power.

For the past few centuries, Buddhism tended to become "fixed." There were national forms of the tradition that did not engage in outward movement. Chinese Buddhism was a clearly defined regional and linguistic form of the religion, as Thai, Burmese, Tibetan, Mongolian etc. In the 20th century there was again a shift and Buddhism which had stayed fixed to certain regions of Asia began to once again expand and move outward. Buddhists immigrants came from Asia to North America. The first group to come were the Chinese émigrés. However, Buddhist monks and nuns did



not follow them to the new location. They were left to devise local religious practices without support from the monastic communities back home. A different pattern emerged when the Japanese groups came to Hawaii and California. They brought along religious leaders to help them as they founded a new pattern of life. But the number of non-Asians involved in the religion was quite small.

After World War II, the patterns of interchange between the U.S. and Northeast Asian changed. Soldiers brought home wives from Japan and Korea who had Buddhist backgrounds. After the Vietnamese War, the involvement with Southeast Asia opened up a new migration of people from that region. The 20th century was a difficult one for Buddhism. It was severely restricted in the Eastern Russian provinces by the Tzarists and later by the communists. As the political system from Russia spread into Mongolia and later to China, Tibet, and Vietnam, the suppression of Buddhism reached unparalleled proportions. It appeared that the religion would be marginalized in large parts of its former strongholds. As late as the mid 1970s, Buddhists were under great pressure in East and Central Asia. The last quarter of the century saw a dramatic reversal of this trend. The tradition was allowed to be reestablished in China and Mongolia. Russian opposition to religion crumbled as the USSR came to an end. China permitted a much greater freedom of religion and both Buddhism and Christianity had revivals.

As Buddhism emerged as a powerful religious practice in Asia it also became portable once again. Buddhist monastics from Tibet, China, Laos, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Laos, and Taiwan joined those from Japan and Korea within the diverse communities of the U.S. While some people have said that the Buddhist success in the U.S. can be attributed to a spiritual vacuum in the "west", it seems more accurate to say that the spread of Buddhism is a result of the energy being generated in Asia. It is the power of Buddhism in its former locations that has permitted it to become a part of the globalization that we have witnessed in the past decades.

Reader's Voice

Itai Doshin — One in mind but many in body

Matt Miller - San Francisco, CA

"If the people are of one mind but many in body, they will accomplish their goals. However, if they are of one body but have different minds, they will be unable to accomplish anything remarkable." — *Itai Doshin*

Nichiren often reminded us to be unified in purpose so we can achieve our goals as followers of the Lotus Sutra. The words *itai doshin*, meaning one in mind but many in body, are often used to describe unity in the Sangha. Nichiren did not make up this idea; the Buddha himself first taught the importance of unity among Buddhists. The creation of the Sangha itself showed the need for a unified group to support those following the Path of the Buddha.

The importance of unity in this group is made clearest by the fact that one of the five most evil acts in Buddhist tradition is causing disunity in the Sangha. In a religion with very few guidelines regarding the conduct of average people — and even fewer that are stated as absolute rules — the fact that this deed is on the top five list of bad actions shows the importance of unity in the Sangha.

In Buddhist history, there is one person who is the prime example of those who cause disunity among Buddhists: Devadatta. During the Buddha's lifetime, Devadatta tried to take over the Sangha and attempted to kill the Buddha. Finally, because of his evil actions he is said to have fallen into hell alive.

Besides the fact that the Buddhist tradition has always placed such great importance on unity, there are practical reasons that we should strive to be of one mind. First among these is that unity enables us to teach Buddhism to others. No one will want to practice with a group of people who constantly fight amongst themselves. This is particularly true of Buddhist groups, which are supposed to be dedicated to peace and understanding. Furthermore, if the Sangha wastes

its energy on disagreement, it will have neither the organization nor the energy to attract new people. Second, lack of unity discourages our own practice of Buddhism. Not only is it difficult to focus on practice when we are distracted by disagreements, but the lack of a sense of community cuts us off from the support we need to practice consistently and correctly. This is contrary to the reason that the Sangha exists. Finally, without unity the very benefits of our Buddhist practice are weakened. Inability to maintain unity indicates that some hold their own desires above the good of the Sangha. Disunity also indicates the presence of feelings of self-importance, distrust, and resentment. All of these are certain to diminish the good effects of Buddhist practice.

With this in mind, it should be clear that it is important for us to understand and nurture our Sangha's unity.

What is the Sangha and What is Unity?

To begin with, we need to define what exactly we mean by "the Sangha" and what we mean by "unity."

In the beginning, the Sangha simply meant those who were followers of the Buddha. In the broadest sense, this is just as true today as it was 2500 years ago. Discussing who is and who is not a "real" Buddhist or a "real" member of our Sangha may seem contrary to the idea of unity within the Sangha. However, some distinction needs to be made. For instance, an individual who denies cause and effect and believes that some other teacher is more correct than the Buddha cannot really be considered a Buddhist, even if that person claims to be one.

The Buddha's criteria are very simple: if a person takes refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha (the Three Jewels), then that person is a Buddhist. This simply means that one must recognize the Buddha as the highest teacher, the Buddha's Dharma (or teaching) as correct, and the followers of the Buddha (the Sangha) as the community best suited to developing one's faith. We should often interpret this as widely as possible so as not to make the mistake of further dividing the Sangha. In this way we can work with all Buddhists who accept the Buddha's core teachings in many cases. However, as a realistic matter, there are differences between Buddhists regarding the correct practice and the correct understanding of the Buddha's Dharma.

As Nichiren Buddhists, we specifically believe that the Lotus Sutra is the highest teaching of the Buddha through which all other teachings must be understood; specifically, the Odaimoku, the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra, is the actual Buddha Dharma. Furthermore, Nichiren himself insisted that the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, is a manifestation of the Eternal Buddha in whom we must take refuge. Therefore, the group with which we should most strive to be unified are those who take refuge in the Eternal Shakyamuni Buddha, the Dharma of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo, and the Sangha that shares these refuges.

At times, we may find that there are people who fulfill this definition of our Sangha, yet believe in doctrines that we reject. We should

still regard them as members of our Sangha, since they fulfill the criteria laid down by Shakyamuni Buddha and Nichiren. However, this does not mean that we must pretend to believe that such people's beliefs are our own. Unity within the Sangha does not necessarily mean believing the exact same things, nor does it mean pretending that differences between the members of the Sangha do not exist. Instead, the unity of the Sangha depends on overcoming our differences and disagreements so that we can still be unified in the things that are truly important: practicing together, showing loving kindness to each other, and working together to achieve the common goals of the Sangha.

How Do We Divide the Sangha?

Let's take a look at how we cause fractures in the Sangha, then discuss how to prevent and heal divisions.

Some ways by which we cause disunity are obvious, such as refusing to cooperate with other members of the Sangha or holding a grudge against another member of the community. Though these are obvious, and it might seem that they should be avoided naturally, we should always monitor ourselves to make sure that we are cooperating in group efforts, being liberal in forgiving others, and refraining from anger, greed, and self-centeredness. We should be particularly careful not to monitor others for this behavior – often, when one notices a problem in another, it is simply a reflection of one's own difficulties.

There are also more subtle ways in which we cause disunity, though they are often related to the more obvious problems. For example, recently I found myself in conflict with another member of my Sangha. Instead of dealing with this in a healthy way, I went to another member of the Sangha who had been discouraged by similar behavior with others and told him about my problems, knowing that he would agree with me. In fact, he did agree with me – but this just served to further discourage him. It did nothing to solve my disagreement nor its causes, and potentially made it more likely that the person I com-

plained to would leave our group since I had reinforced his negative feelings.

We must be very careful not to allow the three poisons to poison our Sangha, either directly or indirectly.

How Do We Unify the Sangha?

One of the best ways to bring a community of people together is to have common goals and shared plans for achieving those goals. Within our groups – whether local, temple-wide, national, or worldwide – we should establish goals for our practice and for educating ourselves and others. Then, when we have agreed on our goals, we need to develop plans to achieve them. A group of any size can try several plans; the important thing is that the whole group works to implement the plan in unity. If a plan does not seem to work, it can be modified or discarded by the whole group. No one should decide by him or her self that a plan has no merit; instead, that person should discuss the effectiveness of the plan with the rest of the group. Working together with the whole group to achieve common goals will strengthen the bonds within the group, whether the plans succeed or fail. Of course, this is only true if success means shared rejoicing instead of individual pride, and if failure means shared learning and new determinations instead of bitter “I told you so” attitudes and stagnation.

Our local group, which until lately had been experiencing stagnation, boredom, and even conflict between its members, recently decided to set definite goals and make specific plans to achieve them. This has begun to bear positive results already. New goals have livened the group up because we are now getting together to do something instead of merely getting together. Our new plans have begun to relieve boredom because we will be trying new things as a group. Best of all, some of the conflict is finally being relieved. Many conflicts result from boredom or a sense of purposelessness. But also, some of the conflicts were over the way things used to be done, and the lack of success in a set of goals that were poorly defined and sometimes not even common

between different members of the group. With unified goals, we are all working towards the same result in new ways. Everyone is also aware now that if the current plans do not work, we can change our plans without destroying the group, just as we did with our latest plans.

Conclusion

Some say that daily Buddhist life should be most characterized by mindfulness. Mindfulness is definitely a key ingredient in maintaining the Sangha's unity: we must be mindful of our own egos, our faults, our reactions to others' perceived faults and actions, the needs of the community, and the needs of the individuals who make up the community. Of course, most of us have not yet perfected our practice of mindfulness, so problems will occasionally arise. We can still overcome these problems with the power of the Odaimoku. The *Lotus Sutra* and Odaimoku can help us prevent divides within our Sangha and build successful, unified communities of Nichiren Buddhists. Even the great example of one who divides the Sangha, Devadatta, is able to succeed with the *Lotus Sutra*. In his letter, “On Prayer,” Nichiren wrote:

[It is natural to suppose that] Devadatta will never be able to escape from ... the avichi hell ... [nonetheless,] he became a Buddha ... this is wholly because of the beneficial powers of the Lotus Sutra.

And we too can look forward to attaining the fulfillment of the Buddha's Path, despite the fact that we are not always perfect examples of preservers of the unity of the Sangha.

If Devadatta, who was guilty of three of the five great sins as well as innumerable others, could become Tathagata Celestial King, then one cannot doubt that other wrongdoers who commit only one or two great sins will also be certain to attain the way ... if one can crush the hardest stones, one can surely bend soft grass. Therefore, the Lotus Sutra is called 'myo.'" – The Odaimoku of the Lotus Sutra



● *NBIC Open House was held*

- About 70 guests in total attended
- NBIC Open House on June 22 & 23.
- It was first open house of the
- Center's facility to the public.
- NBIC plans its open house more often.



● *Guests are checking displays and study materials.*



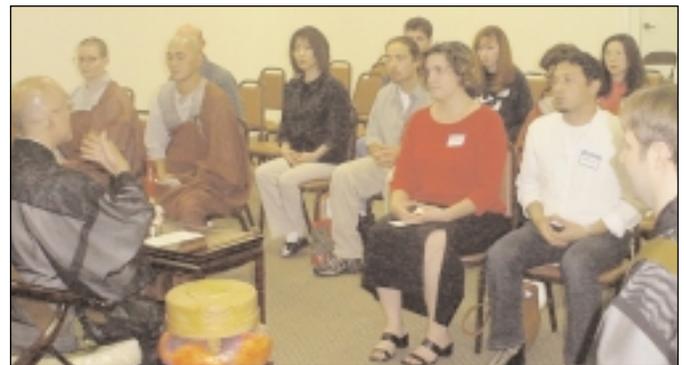
● *Dr. Lewis Lancaster gives a lecture on "Buddhism in America, present and future."*



● *Same as Picture 2*



● *Rev. Kanai instructs participants how to make a bracelet juzu.*



● *Rev. Akahoshi and Rev. McCormick instruct Shodaigyo meditation.*



● *Rev. Tsukamoto instructs Shakyō practice, copying the Lotus Sutra.*



● *Rev. Matsuda leads Sunday service with participants.*