

Session 2 – May

Chapter 1: The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin (1)

—Nichiren Daishonin’s Life and Teachings—

2. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essence of Buddhism and the fundamental Law perceived by Nichiren Daishonin for resolving the suffering of all humanity. Here, we will examine a few of the important aspects of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Fundamental Law That Pervades the Universe and Life

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental Law that pervades the entire universe and all life.

Shakyamuni, the founder of Buddhism, viewed the sufferings of all people as his own and searched for a way to resolve those sufferings. In the process, he awakened to the truth that the eternal, all-pervading, fundamental Law of the universe and life existed within his own being. This realization led to his being known as the Buddha, or “Awakened One.” Then, with wisdom and compassion, he expounded numerous teachings, which later were compiled as Buddhist sutras. Among them, the Lotus Sutra teaches the true essence of the Buddha’s enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin identified this Law to which Shakyamuni awakened—the Law that can resolve human suffering on a fundamental level and open the way to genuine happiness—as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The Essential Law for Attaining Buddhahood

Buddhas are those who have embodied the Law in their own lives, overcome all suffering, and established an unshakable inner state of absolute happiness.

The Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essential principle, or means, for attaining Buddhahood.

The Eternal Law Inherent in All People’s Lives

Buddhas are awakened to the truth that the Law exists not only within their own lives, but also within the lives of all people. They realize that this all-

pervasive Law transcends the bounds of life and death and can never be lost or destroyed.

The Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is universal, inherent in all people; it is also eternal, persisting throughout the three existences of past, present, and future.

The Profound Meaning Reflected in the Name, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

The profound meaning of the fundamental Law is reflected in its name, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Myoho-renge-kyo is the full title of the Lotus Sutra in Japanese and literally translates as “The Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful (Mystic) Law.”

Because the Law expounded in the Lotus Sutra is difficult to fathom and comprehend, it is called the Mystic Law (*myoho*).

The lotus (*rengé*) is used as a metaphor to describe the distinctive characteristics of the Mystic Law.

Though it grows in muddy water, the lotus remains unsullied by its environment, producing pure and fragrant blooms. This conjures images of those who have faith in and practice the Mystic Law. Though they live in the real world that is rife with suffering, they remain pure in thought and action, teaching others and guiding them to enlightenment.

In addition, the lotus, unlike other plants, contains a seed pod (the lotus fruit) within its buds, and the flower and fruit grow and appear at the same time. The flower (the cause) and the fruit (the effect) exist together, simultaneously. This is also used to illustrate that the state of Buddhahood, though indiscernible, exists even in the lives of ordinary people who have not yet manifested that state of life, and further that even after one becomes a Buddha, one does not lose the life states that characterize an ordinary person.

Kyo, meaning “sutra,” indicates that the Lotus Sutra (*Myoho-renge-kyo*) contains the eternal truth—the Mystic Law—and that people should venerate and place their faith in it.

Nam, or *namu*, is the phonetic rendering in Chinese characters of the Sanskrit word *namas*, meaning “bow” or “reverence.” This term was also translated using the Chinese characters meaning “to dedicate one’s life” (*kimyo*). To dedicate one’s life, in this sense, means to devote oneself body and mind to the Law and strive to practice and embody it with one’s entire being.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the very heart and essence of the Buddha, which is expressed in wise and compassionate action to lead all people to enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin's Enlightened State of Life

Although the Lotus Sutra teaches the fundamental Law of the universe and life, it does not reveal the exact nature or name of the Law.

Nichiren Daishonin awakened to the truth that the Law expounded in the Lotus Sutra existed in his own life, and he revealed that Law to be Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

In other words, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is not simply “Myoho-renge-kyo,” the title of the Lotus Sutra, prefaced by the word “*nam*,” but the name of the Law itself.

By revealing the Law to be Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Daishonin opened the way in real terms for fundamentally freeing people from suffering and delusion, which arise from ignorance of the true nature of their lives, and helping them build unshakable happiness.

That is why we revere Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, an age filled with confusion and suffering.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the enlightened life state of Buddhahood, or true identity, of Nichiren Daishonin, who embodied in his being the Law that pervades the universe and all existence.

Ordinary People Are Themselves the Mystic Law

The life state of Buddhahood is also inherent in the lives of unenlightened ordinary people—in every person. All people are inherently and originally Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself.

However, while ignorant of this truth, ordinary people are unable to demonstrate the power and functions of the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that exist within them. To be awakened to this truth is the life state of a Buddha; to doubt or be unaware of this truth is the life state of one who is unenlightened. When we have faith in and actually practice Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the power and functions of the Mystic Law are activated and expressed in our lives, and in this way we manifest the life state of Buddhahood.

The Object of Devotion for Practice, Revealed in the Form of a Mandala

Nichiren Daishonin depicted his own Buddhahood, or enlightened life state, in the form of a mandala. He made this the object of devotion (Gohonzon) for our Buddhist practice, so that we ordinary people can manifest Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in our lives and attain Buddhahood, just as he did.

The Daishonin wrote: “Never seek this Gohonzon [object of devotion] outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND-1, 832).

It is important that we revere Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—the fundamental Law and the life state of Buddhahood embodied in the Gohonzon—believing and accepting that it is inherent in our own lives. By doing so, we can tap the Mystic Law that resides within us and manifest our inherent Buddhahood.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, the Daishonin says: “Great joy [is what] one experiences when one understands for the first time that one’s mind from the very beginning has been a Buddha. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys” (OTT, 211–12).

When we realize that we are inherently Buddhas and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo itself, we can bring forth in our lives wonderful benefit and good fortune without measure. There is no greater joy in life.

When we triumph over hardships through our practice of the Mystic Law, we will lead lives of unsurpassed joy while developing a state of eternally indestructible happiness.