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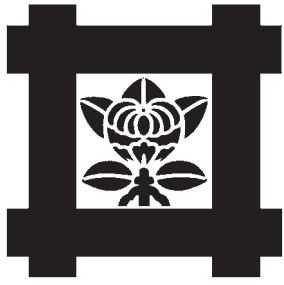
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THE WORLD OF THE ODAIMOKU – PART 9

The Teaching of the Lotus Sutra brightens the world

Article by Rev. Jun-ichi Nakamura
Illustrated by Hiroshige Katsu

This world is filled with anxiety. Even some people feel that the end of this world is about to come. But we should not look hopelessly into the future. The probability of our death is one hundred percent. As we are born in this world, so shall we pass from it but we are not born in this world to despair.

Because we are living in the present world where so many things are coming to a deadlock, we need more power of mind. Do you know the Japanese phrase, “Scrap and build”? It means to scrap the old and useless things and build anew. But please do not misinterpret by thinking “Old people should be gotten rid of” or that everything old is useless. There is a phrase, “Onko-Chishin,” (温故知新) which means learning a lesson from the past. In order to build a new age, experiences of the past are necessary, useful and needed. It is a practical way of “Transmitting” from the past to the present and the future which is the policy of propagation of Nichiren Shū.



Nichiren Shōnin devoted himself to building a new age of Buddhism. Facing continuous natural disasters and political confusion, he thought, “For the sake of making the country peaceful and saving people, there is no other way but establishing the right teaching.” Thus he decided after entering into the library of Jissō-Ji Temple and referring to the Buddhist sutras there.

Two thousand years had passed since Śākyamuni Buddha’s extinction and this time period was to be known as *Mappō*. The idea and knowledge that it was *Mappō*, the Latter Age of Degeneration was spreading during the time of

Nichiren Shōnin. There would be few people who would protect or uphold the Buddha’s teachings during *Mappō*. The society would be corrupt and the people would think the end of the world is coming. It would truly be a dog eat dog world where harmony of the society would fall apart. Many people had decided during Nichiren Shōnin’s time that it was easier to pray for a better life after leaving this Saha world (world of suffering). It is a belief of the Pure Land school to chant to Amida Buddha for salvation. Amida had made a vow to help those who chanted his name by having them be reborn into his world in the western paradise. This world was far from the Saha world where we live now in *Mappō*. This practice appealed to many during the time by stating “Leave this defiled world and seek the Pure Land (after dying).” Nichiren Shōnin himself stated, “Because all other people were praying, I believed in Amida Buddha and chanted his name from my childhood.” (*Myōho Bikuni Gohenji*)

Nichiren Shōnin affirmed in his mind to build a new era of Buddhism in Japan. He stated, “Because I doubted in believing Amida Buddha with some reason, I made up one wish.” This wish was a result of studying all Buddhist schools. After much research and study Nichiren Shōnin found the true voice of Śākyamuni Buddha in the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha’s voice was that *Mappō* is not a period of despair as many during that time believed. The Buddha predicted in the Lotus Sutra that the horrible *Mappō* Period would come after his extinction. Because he knew that *Mappō* would be difficult, he expounded the way in the Lotus Sutra to manage life in the *Mappō* Period.

The Buddha states in the Lotus Sutra, “Many people hate it (the Lotus Sutra) with jealousy even in my lifetime. Needless to say, more people will do so after my extinction,” not only Nichiren Shōnin but even we can see what the Buddha wants to tell us here in this statement. *Mappō* is truly a difficult time.

Nichiren Shōnin caught the Buddha’s message clearly and stated, “‘The Life Span of the Buddha’ chapter together with a half chapter each preceding and following it were expounded specially for the people living after the Buddha’s extinction. It was expounded especially for those in this Latter Age of Degeneration such as Nichiren.” (*Hokke Shuyō-shō*, Writings of Nichiren Shōnin Doctrine 2, P. 212)

Making the *Mappō* Period a starting point, Nichiren Shōnin was seeking a renewal plan for this world. As a result of his study, he wrote *Risshō Ankoku-ron* and believed firmly, stating, “world peace and tranquility of a

nation is what both the sovereign and subjects alike desire, and all the people of a nation wish for. Now, the prosperity of a nation depends on the Dharma, which is revered by the people. When the nation is destroyed and its people perish, who will revere the Buddha and who will put faith in the Dharma?” (*Risshō Ankoku-ron*, Writings of Nichiren Shōnin Doctrine 1, P. 129)

He presented the *Risshō Ankoku-ron* to the government at the time. The Kamakura Shogunate was furious at this treaty and attempted to persecute Nichiren Shōnin to their full ability. Overcoming such difficulties and spreading the *Odaimoku* (Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō), Nichiren Shōnin was convinced that the *Mappō* Period is the time when the Lotus Sutra truly brightens this world.

Nichiren Shōnin stated, “Practice for a hundred years in the Pure Land is not worth the merit of chanting the *daimoku* for one day in this defiled world,” (*Hōon-jō*, Writings of Nichiren Shōnin Doctrine 1, P. 58) with his strong wish to make this defiled (Saha) world the Eternal Buddha’s pure land. “Propagation of the *daimoku* in a two thousand year-period following the death of the Buddha is not worth as much as spreading the *daimoku* for even a short while in the Latter Age of Degeneration,” he stated with plenty of drive, “If we do not rise now, when could we?”

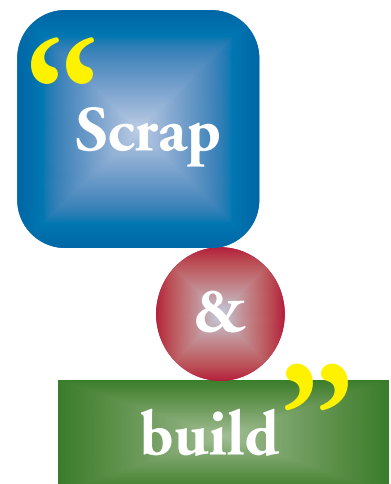
Although we expected the twenty first Century to be a time of peace and harmony, this world is jeopardized by the destructive powers of hate and war. It is a critical time for us to think about the true meaning of *Mappō* and spread the Dharma to save this world.

Glossary

Mappō: the Latter Age of Degeneration

Mappō is one of time classification of spreading Buddhism. First one thousand years after Śākyamuni Buddha’s extinction is called *Shōbō*, which is the time when the Buddha’s teachings spread correctly. Next one thousand years is called *Zōbō*, which is the time there are some people studying the Buddha’s teaching but no one attain enlightenment. And after *Zōbō* there are no one studying the Buddha’s teaching correctly so that Buddhism degenerates.

Phenomenon of *Mappō* was realized as social fear. In 1257 a big earthquake hit Kanto area (current Tokyo area). Then famines and epidemic spread widely and people were suffered so much. Under such circumstance, Pure Land School of Buddhism became so popular because people were giving up happiness in this life but seeking it in the next life. Nichiren Shōnin appealed that *Mappō* is the time that this world would become peaceful and happy by having faith in the Lotus Sutra expounded by the Buddha and chanting the *Odaimoku*, *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*.



The Lotus Sutra for children

by Rev. Koge Matsumoto Translated by Rev. Shokai 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.)

INTRODUCTION CHAPTER OF THE LOTUS SUTRA (VOLUME 2)

~ Chapter 1 ~

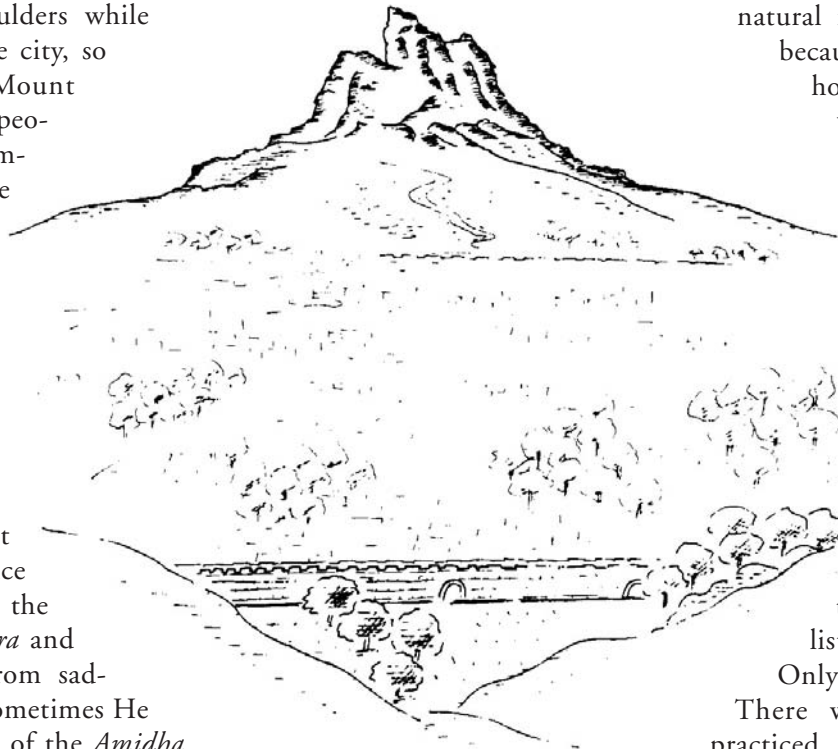
THE PLACE IS MOUNT SACRED EAGLE IN INDIA

There is a high, rocky mountain in the city of Rahagriha, India. The mountain is shaped like an eagle perking up its shoulders while looking down at the city, so people called it Mount Sacred Eagle. The people of the city commune with the mountain.

After Buddha Śākyamuni attained Enlightenment, He traveled all over India. He expounded various teachings to many people in different places. He had once taught teachings of the *Agon* or *Agamas Sutra* and saved the people from sadness and worries. Sometimes He taught the teachings of the *Amidha Sutra* to save the people from sufferings. Later He taught the *Heart Sutra* for the people to understand the concept of “No-Self” or “Emptiness.” With these teachings, He led the people with their meek

minds to awaken to the concept of “the Buddha always watches over us.”

The Buddha was already 72 years old. Forty-two years had passed since He became enlightened. It is said that He taught about 84,000



teachings throughout the years. As he traveled throughout India, he taught teachings that were appropriate to the people’s level of understanding. He chose Mt. Sacred

Eagle in the city of Rahagriha for his final teaching place.

It was exciting. The Buddha would speak some very important teachings! My goodness! Not only human beings, but gods, bodhisattvas, animals and all kinds of living beings gathered at the mountain from around the world. It was natural for them to come there because the Buddha, the most honorable one in the universe, was going to expound some very important teachings.

During the past 42 years, so many people were saved by listening to the Buddha. Animals and plants in the forests and the woods sensed the Buddha’s words.

There were deities in the heavens who rejoiced listening to the One and Only Reality of the Universe.

There were Bodhisattvas who practiced the Buddha’s teachings. None of them could sit still in their homes and instead came swarming the mountain. The Buddha was going to give them his last and most important teaching! It was the *Lotus Sutra*.

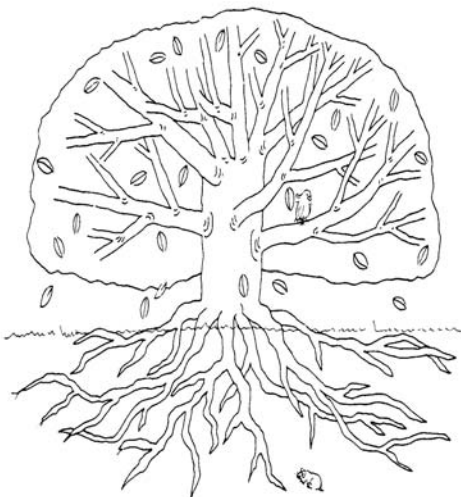
— Chapter 2 —

THE TRUTH IS NOT YET REVEALED

The Buddha Śākyamuni was quietly sitting and meditating at the highest peak of Mt. Sacred Eagle. Before that, He had expounded the teachings of the Sutra of Innumerable Teachings as the prelude to the *Lotus Sutra*.

In this sutra, the Buddha revealed the following teachings: “Innumerable teachings I expounded in the past are like the leaves, branches and trunks of a huge tree. A tree never grows without its roots. I have taught innumerable teachings for 42 years; however, I have not yet revealed the true teachings that are the roots of the tree.”

Everybody was surprised! They said with astonishment, “He has not taught us the truth even after 42 years!” After his great declaration, the Buddha kept his silence and closed his eyes and remained in meditation. He kept quiet as if nothing had happened. This was the beginning of the Lotus Sutra.



— Chapter 3 —

THE BUDDHA'S DISCIPLES



五人の比丘
Five Monks

The most surprised people were the five monks, including Kaundinya. They were the ones who requested to become disciples of the Buddha when He preached His First Sermon at Deer Park. Now there were over 12,000 disciples, including the five original disciples.

One of the other disciples was Sariputra, who understood all of the Buddha's teachings no matter how difficult. He was “The Number One Wisdom Disciple.”

Maudgalyana, Sariputra's best friend, was “The Number One Possessor of Supernatural Power.” He was able to see through anything and was able to look into the past and the future. With his power, he searched for his mother who raised him with her deep love. How is she doing after her death? He was shocked to see her suffering terribly in the realm of the hungry

spirits. He felt so sad and sorry for her great suffering. He went to the Buddha for help and asked, “Buddha, why is my mother in such a terrible state of suffering? How can I save her?”

The Buddha answered, “She was much too proud of you, a wise son. Being proud became vanity, which made her strongly attach herself to you even after you renounced the world and became my disciple. Her strong attachment made her fall into the realm of the hungry spirits. If you wish to save her, you must ease her attachment by asking as many of my disciples as possible to hold a memorial service for all the hungry spirits. The merits of the memorial service will lead her to repent her wrong conduct and to have a pure mind. This incident is the origin of today's *segaki*, a memorial service for hungry spirits. (to be continued)



「ちえ第一」の
舍利弗さん
Sariputra

One Point Buddhism

Why do we need to hold a memorial service?

**Rev. Chishin Hirai,
Honolulu Hawaii**

No matter what religion you practice, everybody agrees that family is important. How do we define family? Who are your family members? You could say that your family is those closest to you such as your husband, wife, parents, brothers, sisters or children. But what about your extended family such as your grandparents, grandchildren, uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews? If you say that your grandparents are part of your family, then aren't your great grandparents or your great grandchildren? You probably think that your children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and other descendants are all part of your family. Unfortunately, many people think that unseen people are not their family. If your great grandchildren or great nieces and great nephews did not acknowledge your sacrifices and contributions for their benefit after you passed away, how would you feel? However, what do you think about your parents, grandparents, great grandparents and other ancestors? All would agree that nuclear family is family. Most would say the same for their extended family. So do you think that your ancestors are your family?

All of us will lose our parents. As time passes we will lose husbands, wives, brothers, sisters or children. Are the deceased a part of your family? Once dead do they cease being part of your family? From a Buddhist perspective, they are your family whether living or dead. No matter what happens, family relationships are forever.



A whole family of a deceased gather together for memorial service.

Your parents, grandparents, great grandparents, aunts and uncles did their best for you just as you are doing your best for your children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews. We are here today because of the efforts of our family over the generations. If one link was missing in our family chain we would not have been born. We do not live alone separate from our past or future. We are a living link between the past and the future. We are the connection between our past and future families. It is our responsibility to take good care of what our past family has left for us, make it better and pass it on to our progeny. If someone does not take care of their parents, they may not be taken care of by their children. Our children learn from the example we set just as their children will learn from them. So all family is equally important whether those who lived long before you or who will be born after you die. A religion which does not teach about the importance of past and future family does not teach true family values.

Holding a memorial service is a way we can honor our ancestors for their sacri-

fices and efforts on our behalf. We accumulate great benefits by chanting *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* and then, transfer these benefits to our ancestors. In Buddhism, we say that there are 10 worlds after death. They are, the world of hell, hungry spirits, animals, anger, humans, heavenly beings, Sravaka, Pratyekabuddha, Bodhisattva and Buddha. After someone passes away, they are reborn into one of these 10 worlds. We live in the human world. We are capable of both good and bad in our daily lives. We are accumulating good and bad karma because of our actions. Our karma will be a determining factor to which world we will be reborn in our next life. The deceased, unfortunately, cannot accumulate merits for themselves. That's why we dedicate our merit to them. The more we as family chant together for our deceased relatives, the more merit they receive. A memorial service is a way in which we assist our past family to be reborn into a better world and have a wonderful life there. Nichiren Shōnin said,

"Our heads are given by our parents. Our legs are given by our parents. Our

fingers are given by our parents. Our mouths are given by our parents. Our entire body is inherited from our parents." Our body is not just ours. We inherit our body from our ancestors from generation to generation. The benefits we enjoy have been nurtured and passed along by our ancestors. To pray for our ancestors means to pray for ourselves because we in our bodies and minds contain this inheritance passed from generation to generation.

How do we cherish our future family and our descendants? First, we should tell our children, grand children, nieces and nephews about the true meaning of family. We should hold memorial services for our ancestors together with our families. By our teaching and example the younger generations will understand their family history and the sacrifices made by those who came before them. The best way to cherish your family is to instruct them concerning the teachings of Buddhism.

Buddhism teaches the true importance of family. Some people say that Buddhism is out-of-date and superstitious because they fail to understand the karmic link between each of us, those who come before and those who will come after us. As we learn about Buddhism, we begin to understand that Buddhism is very logical and its teaching is beyond time and space. Buddhism is the religion which teaches us the true connection between family in the past, present and future. The hard efforts of our ancestors have led to this moment in time and the benefits we enjoy. Our efforts in this time will directly impact how our progeny benefit or suffer in the future. It is the great benefit given to us by our ancestors to meet the Dharma in our current lives. We owe a debt to our ancestors and have a responsibility to pass it on to our future generations.

A Five Day Intense Seminar improves Nichiren Shū Shamis

The Nichiren Buddhist International Center (NBIC) held the 8th Annual Shami Seminar from October 27th to 31st at the Center's facility in Hayward, California. Shami Kanjin Cederman from Toronto, Canada; Shamini Myokei Caine-Barret from Houston, Texas; Shami Ryunin Sorenson from Portland, Oregon and Shami Shoken Conley from London, England participated in this year's seminar. This seminar was Shami Cederman's fourth time, Shamini Caine-Barret's second time and it was the first time for Shami Sorenson and Shami Conley. Rev. Ryuken Akahoshi, general manager of NBIC, Rev. Kanto Tsukamoto of Toronto, Rev. Chisen Maeda of Honolulu, Hawaii and special instructor from Japan, Rev. Junsei Kimura instructed and guided the Shami in the intense seminar. Rev. Kimura has been a instructor for

Sōdō-rin in Japan, which is an official training session Nichiren Shū requires before a Shami can participate in Shingyō Dōjō (official monastery of Nichiren Shū to become a Nichiren Shū minister). Because of his great knowledge in the training of Shami, he was invited to teach and give his experiences to the Shamis of North America and England.

NBIC had held the Shami Seminar for seven times. This time its curriculum followed the Sōdō-rin style as follows;

- 1, to master discipline of a Shami
- 2, to get used to living in a group and monastery
- 3, to master serving others as their first priority
- 4, to master basic manners as a minister



The family accumulate merit for their ancestor by holding a memorial service.

Four Nichiren Shu Shamis, (from left on second row) Kanjin Cederman, Ryūnin Sorenson, Shōken, and Myōkei Caine-Barrett had a intense five day practice under the instruction from reverends, (from left on first row) Chisen Maeda, Ryuken Akahoshi, Kanto Tsukamoto, and Junsei Kimura.



Their training followed an intense daily schedule;

| | |
|------------|-----------------------------|
| 5:00 a.m. | Wake up |
| 5:30 a.m. | Water Purification (Suigyō) |
| 6:15 a.m. | Morning Service |
| 7:00 a.m. | Clean Up |
| 7:40 a.m. | Breakfast |
| 8:30 a.m. | Copying the Lotus Sutra |
| 9:30 a.m. | Lecture |
| 11:15 a.m. | Practice service manner |
| 12:00 p.m. | Lunch |
| 1:00 p.m. | Practice service manner |
| 3:10 p.m. | Practice chanting the sutra |
| 5:00 p.m. | Evening Service |
| 6:00 p.m. | Supper |
| 7:00 p.m. | Practice chanting the sutra |
| 9:00 p.m. | Water Purification |
| 9:30 p.m. | Meeting |

A traditional method of training called *Ichi-Ichi mon-mon* was introduced and used during chanting practice for the Shami. One instructor and one shami would sit facing each other, and the instructor would read one phrase of the sutra. The Shami would repeat exactly what the instructor had read. This

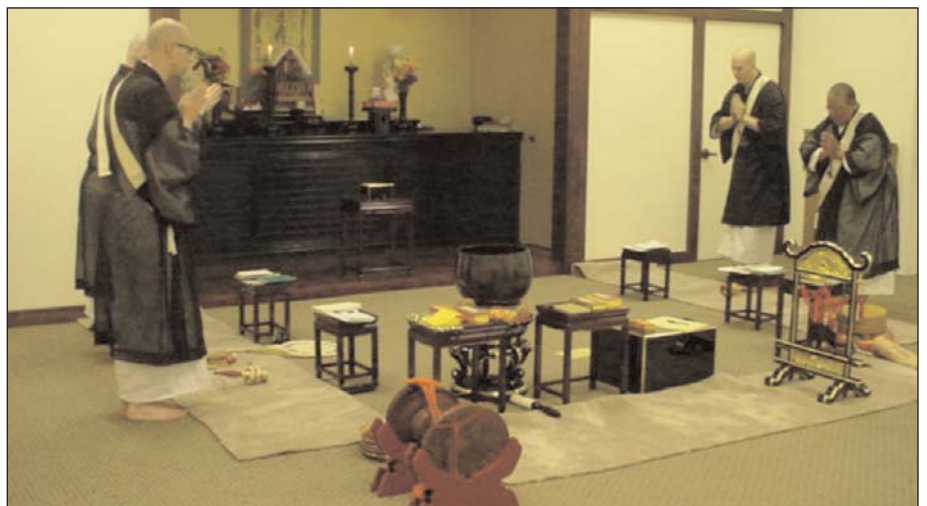
method helps the shami read the sutra correctly and loudly with the correct pronunciation of the Kanji characters.

The Shamis learned the spirit of serving the Three Treasures, Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and practiced having compassion to others by helping each other, during the five day seminar. Shami Kanjin Cederman stated, “I learned how to support others by assisting my fellow Shamis with their learning and practice so that they may improve with us all together.” “I learned the purpose and the power of chanting so that the words of the

Buddha can be clearly understood by those who hear,” stated Shamini Myokei Caine-Barret. “I learned that I need to be much more patient than I am. I will overcome this problem with more Odaimoku,” said Shami Ryunin Sorenson. Shami Shoken Conley remarked, “I feel the largest, most important lesson I have learned here is a new, deeper understanding of *Itai Doshin**. Three individuals I had never met have become family to me over night. The faith and bond we share – not just between ourselves – but also with Nichiren Shū ministers is as deep and wide as the Buddha’s compassion.”

We are hoping that the Shamis who participated in this years seminar will go to Shingyo Dōjō, mandatory monastery, in the near future to become official Nichiren Shū ministers and begin their mission of spreading the Dharma. We also hope that other people will feel the calling of the Buddha and Nichiren Shōnin to become new Shamis and continue the growth of Nichiren Shū and to spread the Odaimoku all over the world.

* *Itai Doshin* - Many in Body, One in Mind; a concept used by Nichiren Shōnin to refer to the unity of the Sangha (congregation).



Four Shamis practice service manner during the seminar.