

## 'The One Essential Phrase' Part 2

### Prayer Is the Sun That Dispels Suffering

PRESIDENT Josei Toda taught that we should study the Daishonin's writings with a spirit of wholehearted conviction in their truth.

Buddhism is, in a sense, a science. Physics takes the physical world as its subject. Sociology looks at social phenomena. Psychology investigates the human psyche. By the same token, Buddhism is a science that takes life in its entirety as its subject. Happiness and suffering are what it investigates.

How can this world be rid of misery? How can each person lead the happiest life? How can that happiness and good fortune be made eternally indestructible? These are the questions that Buddhism pursues.

The vast body of all sutras, known collectively as the eighty thousand teachings, and the countless treatises and interpretations that came later, represent the progress of this investigation and its findings. The Goshō then embodies the conclusion of all this research.

Imagine someone new to the study of physics sitting in on lectures by Einstein, who stood at the pinnacle of his field. If from the outset the neophyte doubted everything Einstein said, he or she would not grow in understanding.

Therefore, President Toda taught, when we read the Goshō, we should receive it with our entire beings—with a spirit of "Yes, that's exactly right." This is the shortcut to happiness.

**Similarly, included within the title, Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō, is the entire sutra [the Lotus Sutra] consisting of all eight volumes, twenty-eight chapters and 69,384 characters without exception. Concerning this, Po Chū-i<sup>1</sup> stated that the title is to the sutra as eyes are to the Buddha. In the eighth volume of his *Hokke Mongu Ki*,<sup>2</sup> Miao-lo stated that T'ien-t'ai's *Hokke Gengi* explains only the title, but that the entire sutra is thereby included. By this he meant that, although the text was omitted, the entire sutra was contained in the title alone. Everything has its essential point, and the heart of the Lotus Sutra is its title, Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō. Truly, if you chant this in the morning and evening, you are correctly reading the entire Lotus Sutra. Chanting daimoku twice is the same as reading the entire sutra twice, one hundred daimoku equal one hundred readings of the sutra, and a thousand daimoku, a thousand readings of the sutra. Thus, if you ceaselessly chant daimoku, you will be continually reading the Lotus Sutra. The sixty volumes of the T'ien-t'ai doctrine<sup>3</sup> present exactly the same interpretation. (MW-1, 222)**

IN Nichiren Daishonin's day, some carried out the practice of reading the Lotus Sutra in its entirety. The Daishonin indicates, however, that this is not necessary. He says that chanting the daimoku, or title of the sutra, once is the same as reading the entire sutra once, and that chanting a thousand daimoku is the same as reading

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the sutra a thousand times.

As indicated by the word *ceaselessly* in this passage from “The One Essential Phrase,”<sup>4</sup> the important thing is to continue the practice of chanting daimoku throughout our lives. The amount of daimoku we chant each day will naturally vary somewhat over time. That’s perfectly all right. The important thing is that we continue chanting daimoku throughout our lives.

Even if someone has practiced hard for many years, if he or she should abandon faith, from that moment on his or her life will become dark—like a light that has been unplugged.

As we see here and in many other Gosho, Nichiren Daishonin invariably backs up his arguments with documentary proof. He quotes sutra passages and cites the interpretations of T’ien-t’ai, Miao-lo and Dengyo. Why?

Since the Daishonin is the original Buddha, one might suppose that he could have simply described his enlightenment directly. But had he done so, the people of his time might not have been convinced of the truth of his words. Therefore, he cites textual sources to clarify that he is not speaking arbitrarily. “My teaching exactly accords with what Shakyamuni says, and with the interpretations of the great teachers T’ien-t’ai and Dengyo,” he pointed out. “Therefore, please believe it wholeheartedly.”

So when we study a passage of the Gosho where the Daishonin cites Shakyamuni’s words and the interpretations of T’ien-t’ai and Dengyo, we should understand that the Daishonin, in his mercy, is trying to ensure that we, despite our strong tendency to doubt, are not confused. He is trying to give us confidence that what he says is correct.

When we can thus sense the Daishonin’s immense compassion, we are deeply reading the Gosho.

**A law this easy to embrace and this easy to practice was taught for the sake of all humankind in this evil age of the Latter Day of the Law. A passage from the Lotus Sutra refers to [its practice] “in the Latter Day of the Law.”<sup>5</sup> Another reads, “[if a bodhisattva] in the latter age hereafter, when the Law is about to perish, should accept and embrace, read and recite this sutra....”<sup>6</sup> A third states, “In the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law if there is someone who can uphold this sutra....”<sup>7</sup> A fourth reads, “In the last five hundred year period you must spread it abroad widely.”<sup>8</sup> The intent of all these teachings is the admonition to embrace and believe in the Lotus Sutra in this Latter Day of the Law. The learned priests of Japan, China and India who have turned their backs on the true teaching have all failed to comprehend this obvious meaning. They follow either the Hinayana or the provisional Mahayana teachings of the Nembutsu, Shingon, Zen and Ritsu sects; but have discarded the Lotus Sutra. The people do not realize that the priests misunderstand Buddhism and trust them without the slightest doubt because they appear to be true priests. Therefore, unintentionally, the people have become enemies of the Lotus Sutra and foes of Shakyamuni Buddha. From the viewpoint of the sutra, it is certain that not only will all their wishes remain unfulfilled, but their lives will be short and, after this life,**

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## **they will be doomed to the hell of incessant suffering. (MW-1, 222–23)**

CHANTING daimoku is a teaching that is “easy to embrace and easy to practice.” Anyone can perform it. It can be done anytime and anywhere. It is the most highly refined and simplified method of practice. As such, it is the perfect Buddhist teaching for not only the twenty-first century but for the twenty-second, thirtieth and fiftieth centuries, and for the ten thousand years and more of the Latter Day of the Law—for all eternity.

President Toda, smiling brightly, would say:

If a large hospital were to concoct a treatment that, if you took it every day for an hour, would enable you to become happy without fail in both body and spirit, the place would no doubt be packed. Regardless of whether it was expensive or if you had to wait in line for hours, people would come every day to receive it.

We can get this medicine, the mystic medicine of dai-moku, in our own homes—and while sitting down, at that. All we need to pay for are candles and incense. So from the standpoint of cost, it is the least expensive method available. If someone just grumbles and fails to carry out the practice, it’s a great waste.

The practice of chanting daimoku embodies the Buddha’s ardent and heartfelt wish to lead all people to happiness. A practice that only certain people can carry out goes against the Buddha’s spirit.

Nevertheless, the Buddhist priests of Japan, China and India have prompted people to discard the Lotus Sutra and have trampled on the Buddha’s spirit. Because these aberrant priests have had the appearance of “true priests,” the people have been deceived. In this Goshō, we can hear the Daishōnin crying out for people to open their eyes and use their wisdom.

A follower of Buddhism ought to practice as Shakyamuni instructs. Those claiming to be the Daishōnin’s followers ought to do as Nichiren Daishōnin says. Otherwise, they are not true followers.

False priests try to make people abide by their mistaken beliefs and opinions. This is the inherent danger in a situation where a clergy assumes the role of directing the laity.

For precisely this reason, the SGI makes the Gohonzon and the Goshō its eternal foundation. It is vital that we always practice in direct accord with Nichiren Daishōnin’s teaching.

### **Faith: The Key to Eternal Happiness**

**Even though one neither reads nor studies the sutra, chanting the title alone is the source of tremendous good fortune. The sutra teaches that women, evil men, and those in the realms of Animality and Hell—in fact, all the people of the Ten Worlds—can attain Buddhahood. We can comprehend this when we remember that fire can be produced by a stone taken from the**

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bottom of a river, and a candle can light up a place that has been dark for billions of years. If even the most ordinary things of this world are such wonders, then how much more wondrous is the power of the Mystic Law. The lives of human beings are fettered by evil karma, earthly desires and the inborn sufferings of life and death. But due to the three inherent potentials of Buddha nature—innate Buddhahood, the wisdom to become aware of it, and the action to manifest it—our lives can without doubt come to reveal the Buddha's three enlightened properties. The Great Teacher Dengyo declared that the power of the Lotus Sutra enables anyone to manifest Buddhahood in their present form. He stated this because even the Dragon King's daughter was able to attain Buddhahood through the power of the Lotus Sutra. Do not doubt this in the least. Let your husband know that I will explain this in detail when I see him.

**Nichiren**

**The third day of the seventh month in the first year of Koan (1278) (MW-1, 223–24)**

DAIMOKU is like light. As the Daishonin says, "A candle can light up a place that has been dark for billions of years." Similarly, the moment we offer prayers based on daimoku, the darkness in our lives vanishes. This is the principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect. At that very instant, in the depths of our lives, our prayer has been answered.

The inherent cause (*nyo ze in*) of a deep prayer simultaneously produces a latent effect (*nyo ze ka*). While it takes time for this effect to become manifest, in the depths of our lives, our prayers are immediately realized. So at that moment light shines forth. The lotus flower (*rengo*), in blooming and seeding at the same time, illustrates this principle of simultaneity of cause and effect.

Therefore, it is important that we offer prayers with great confidence. The powers of the Buddha and the Law are activated in direct proportion to the strength of our faith and practice. Strong faith is like a high voltage—it turns on a brilliant light in our lives.

Prayers are invisible, but if we pray steadfastly they will definitely effect clear results in our lives and surroundings in time. This is the principle of the true entity of all phenomena. Faith means having confidence in this invisible realm. Those who impatiently pursue only visible gains, who put on airs, or who are caught up in vanity and formalism will definitely become deadlocked.

In the SGI organization, the success of our activities or meetings, for example, hinges on whether the leaders have prayed thoroughly to give each person hope and for each participant, without fail, to leave the activity with a sense of profound fulfillment. Those who are only concerned with what others think of them are not qualified to be SGI leaders.

People who base themselves on prayer are sincere. Prayer cleanses and expands the heart, and instills character.

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## Sufferings Are the Raw Material of Happiness

DAIMOKU is also like fire. When you burn the firewood of earthly desires, then the fire of happiness—that is, of enlightenment—burns brightly. Sufferings thus become the raw material for constructing happiness. For someone who does not have faith in the Mystic Law, sufferings may be only sufferings. But for a person with strong faith, sufferings function to enable him or her to become happier still.

Faith is inextinguishable hope. The practice of faith is a struggle to realize our desires. And the basis of this practice is prayer. Through prayer, hope turns into confidence. This spirit of confidence unfolds in three thousand ways, finally resulting in the attainment of our hopes. Therefore, we must never give up.

Even places that have been shrouded in darkness for billions of years can be illuminated. Even a stone from the bottom of a river can be used to produce fire. Our present sufferings, no matter how dark, have certainly not continued for billions of years—nor will they linger forever. The sun will definitely rise. In fact, its ascent has already begun.

Those who over long periods grow accustomed to being miserable may acquire the tendency to give up. But with the Mystic Law we need never resign ourselves to defeat.

To put ourselves down is to denigrate the world of Buddhahood in our lives. It is tantamount to slandering the Gohonzon. The same is true of setting your mind that absolutely nothing can be done about some particular problem or suffering.

Also, we must not decide in advance that a particular person or a particular area is a lost cause. It is precisely when faced with challenging circumstances that we need to pray. The key is to offer concrete prayers and take action—until results are produced.

For instance, until a few years ago no one could even have imagined friends of the Mystic Law active in the former Soviet Union and other communist bloc countries. But the age has now changed. The long period of darkness has been broken. The starting point for this change lay in prayers for the people of those countries to definitely become happy and to shine with hope.

Prayers based on the Mystic Law are not abstract. They are a concrete reality in our lives. To offer prayers is to conduct a dialogue, an exchange, with the universe. When we pray, we embrace the universe with our lives, our determination. Prayer is a struggle to expand our lives.

So prayer is not a feeble consolation; it is a powerful, unyielding conviction. And prayer must become manifest in action. To put it another way, if our prayers are in earnest, they will definitely give rise to action.

Prayer becomes manifest in action, and action has to be backed up by prayer. Only then can we elicit a response from the Buddhist gods and all Buddhas. Those who pray and take action for kosen-rufu are the Buddha's emissaries. They cannot fail to realize lives in which all desires are fulfilled.

Even if we have so much happiness that we wish for a little suffering, our happiness continues to increase by leaps and bounds—like a kite that soars ever higher. That is the proof of attaining Buddha-hood. Moreover, if we succeed in

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firmly establishing the world of Buddhahood in this lifetime, it will be ours eternally.

As the Daishonin indicates at the end of this letter, where he says, “Do not doubt this in the least,” we need to have great confidence and live with great hope, whether we are young or old. When we manifest great hope, we can calmly survey our former sufferings. We can see that we have been taking small problems and blowing them up, worrying about them all out of proportion.

With this letter, the Daishonin appeals to all humankind: “Let us live with hope! Eternally! Our mind of faith instantaneously becomes the cause, the effect—and the power—of eternal happiness. It translates into great joy and great fulfillment.”

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1. Po Chü-i (772–846): Noted Chinese poet of the T’ang dynasty.
2. *Hokke Mongu Ki* (Annotations on the *Hokke Mongu* [Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra]).
3. Sixty volumes of the T’ien-t’ai doctrine: The three major works of T’ien-t’ai—*Hokke Gengi* (Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra), *Hokke Mongu* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra) and *Maka Shikan* (Great Concentration and Insight)—and Miao-lo’s annotations of these. Each of these comprises ten volumes.
4. “Myoho-ama Gozen Gohenji” (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1402–03), written in July 1278, when the Daishonin was 57. Editor’s Note: The Gosho text here may differ in places from what appears in *The Major Writings* or other previously published translations. This is so that the wording of the English text will accord more smoothly with the modern Japanese translation of the original Japanese Gosho. (The author is using a modern Japanese rendering of the classical Japanese original as the basis of his lectures in this series.)
5. LS14, 201.
6. LS14, 203.
7. LS17, 242.
8. LS23, 288.

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