

WHAT A CONCEPT: ‘Renge’ (Lotus)
What’s a Flower Like You Doing in a Swamp Like This?
By LISA JONES, Staff Writer

The lotus blossom is symbolic in Buddhism; it illustrates the idea that although human beings live in the muddy, mucky world of suffering and attachment, we can draw forth our Buddhahood and thus blossom in the same way that a lotus flower blossoms in a swamp. The flower is inseparable from the muck; the muck, in fact, makes it possible for the flower to thrive. *Renge*, one of the components of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, literally means lotus blossom.

In Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, there are two other ways to interpret the meaning of *renge*. First, it’s a metaphor for the Mystic Law; because the lotus blooms and seeds at the same time, it represents the simultaneity of cause and effect, which is the essence of the Mystic Law. Second, *renge* is not a metaphor but is itself the principle of simultaneous cause and effect; it is the Mystic Law.

This second point is difficult to grasp — just as the subtleties of cause and effect are difficult to grasp. The Daishonin’s teachings do not simply emphasize the law of cause and effect. Rather, the Daishonin sought to liberate people from the chains of conventional causality. The moment we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, he teaches, we orient ourselves in the present and toward the future. While humble self-reflection is always necessary, to dwell on the past or worry about correcting past causes is not the point of Buddhist practice.

In “Letter from Sado,” the Daishonin explains the general law of cause and effect — essentially, that one’s present sufferings are due to negative causes made in the past — but then goes on to say, “Nichiren’s sufferings, however, are not ascribable to this causal law” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 40). Through chanting, we discover our mission in life and come to see our circumstances (or karma) as the path of our mission rather than punishment or reward for past causes.

SGI President Ikeda explains this further in *The New Human Revolution*, volume 1: “It is true that Buddhism teaches that one who commits evil deeds against others will receive the negative effects of those actions and live an unhappy life. This is just one aspect, however. Were it the entire teaching on karma, then people would be doomed to live under a cloud of guilt and vague anxiety, not knowing what offenses they might have committed in past lives. It would also mean that people’s destiny was fixed — a concept that could easily rob them of their energy and passion. It might also cause people to lapse into a passive way of life, simply concerning themselves with not doing anything bad.

“The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin goes far beyond the framework of superficial causality,” he writes. “It elucidates the most fundamental cause and shows us the means for returning to the pure life within that has existed since time without beginning. This fundamental cause is to awaken to our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth and dedicate our lives to the widespread propagation of the Law.”

Interestingly, the name Nichiren means Sun Lotus, and he writes, “Giving myself the name *Nichiren* signifies that I attained enlightenment by myself” (MW-1, 236). He also writes that “the Lotus Sutra is the sun and the moon and the lotus flower. Therefore it is called Myoho-enge-kyo (the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Mystic Law)...” (MW-4, 87).

Renge, then, expresses not only cause and effect but the well-spring from which Buddhist teachings arise.

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