

**BACK TO THE BASICS
REVEALING ONE’S TRUE IDENTITY
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After Shakyamuni’s death, direct contact with the Buddha became impossible. And over time, as Shakyamuni began to be deified, what was described as the path of Buddhahood gradually began to depart from the path of the human being. The spirit to seek the eternal Law in the realm of daily life eventually disappeared, and Shakyamuni’s enlightenment came to be thought of as beyond the grasp of ordinary human beings.

Nichiren Daishonin, who appeared about 2,000 years after Shakyamuni, at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law—a defiled age rife with confusion, when Shakyamuni’s teachings lose their power to lead people to enlightenment—proclaimed the essence of the Lotus Sutra as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. By introducing the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, a way for any person to practice the Lotus Sutra, he was carrying out a great religious revolution, returning Buddhism to the human being.

Shakyamuni’s contemporary disciples for the first 40 years of his teachings believed he had first attained the state of unsurpassed enlightenment in that lifetime at the age of 30, while seated under the Bodhi tree in India. However in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, he reveals for the first time that he actually attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past.

With this startling revelation of his true identity as the Buddha of the remote past, he opened his disciple’s eyes for the first time to the “eternal Law” to which he had awakened. In other words, he was pointing to the true aspect of life—that Buddhahood does not suddenly appear in our lives but has always existed inherently in our lives from time without beginning. The Daishonin says, “We repeat the cycle of birth and death secure upon the earth of our intrinsically enlightened nature” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 724).

With the inscription of the Gohonzon for all humankind, the Daishonin made concrete the eternal Law that is found in our own lives. By chanting the Mystic Law to the Gohonzon, our strong faith itself becomes the simultaneous cause and effect of Buddhahood in each moment of life. The great freedom to discover and express our true identity is ours.