

Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple of UK Newsletter

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Wonder of Odaimoku

Nichiren Shu teaches people to chant Odaimoku “Namu Myoho Renge Kyo” on a daily basis. The Lotus Sutra, which is the Buddha’s final teaching, expounds all essences of the Buddha’s enlightenment based on the universal law of all things in nature. It is said traditionally that when we chant Odaimoku with all our heart, which is the title of the Lotus Sutra, with a sense of faith, our Buddha nature within our mind will fuse with the Buddha's mind through the chanting and we are able to receive the Buddha’s rewards unconsciously, such as wisdom, compassion, supernatural powers and enlightenment. Why does Odaimoku have such belief? At this time, I would like to explain about the meaning of Odaimoku although it is difficult to explain in words.



“Namu” originates from the Sanskrit word “Namasu” which means “Devotion” and was transposed into two Kanji characters “Na” and “Mu” pronounced similarly a long time ago. Therefore, the two characters are not used for the primitive meaning “South” and “Nothing” nor separated individually. What is used is “Namu” two words as one word, signifying “Devotion”.

“Myo” basically has two meanings, “Wonder function as too microscopic to discern” and “Mysterious circumstance”. Originally “Myo” comes from the Sanskrit “Sat” which means “Right, virtue and truth”. When the “Sat” connects to the next word “Ho:Dharma”, it becomes Sat-Dharma and ends up as “Saddharma”. Then, all of a sudden “Myo” has an amazing meaning. It means, “Open all mysterious gates in the universe and awaken hidden power, development and resuscitate life”. This implies that the teaching of the Lotus Sutra has wonderful mysterious powers, to engender a life from the sterile land, grow and regenerate all like the sun. “Myo is to resuscitate life” Said Nichiren Shonin in his letter.

“Ho” generally means a “rule or precept” today. Primarily “Ho” originated from the Sanskrit “Dharma” which means “holding and law” but when used in a Buddhist context it has a unique meaning. It means “a wonder dispensation in nature and permanent truths” or “Universal Law” and also the Buddha’s teaching- because of the Buddha’s enlightenment 2500 years ago; His achievement was a conclusion to “Universal Law”. So, “Ho:Dharma” means both “Universal Law” and the Buddha’s teachings. The essence of “Universal Law” is expounded as the Buddha’s teaching into the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, no matter how quickly we progress with human generations or advance greatly in science and technology, the teaching of the Lotus Sutra will never be contradicted if humans follow the universal law, deliver universal peace and enlightenment for suffering people constantly. The universal law means

eternal truths that never change from the past to the future, such as the law of gravity on this earth will never change, the time is passing constantly and will never change, all living things have to grow old; birth and death will never change. This teaching extends not only to the laws on the earth, but also the laws in the universe. Even in those days, there were already such concepts as “Universe” or “Other planet” in Buddhism. In the Lotus Sutra, some expressions such as “the appearance of Bodhisattvas from underground” which means “Bodhisattvas who were born on the earth” and “Bodhisattvas who had come from other worlds” which means “Bodhisattvas who had come from other planets” are used.

Translated, “Myo ho” literally means, “The eternal teaching to open all wonderful mysterious gates, awaken hidden power, develop hidden power, develop and resuscitate life”. So all universal laws, all phenomena and all other teachings, even god’s act, can be expressed with only two words: “Myo ho”.

“Ren” is lotus and “Ge” is flower and “Renge” means lotus flower. The title of the Lotus Sutra is named after the lotus flower symbolically, because lotus and lotus flower have suitable unique natures to symbolize the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The lotus grows in muddy ponds and blooms beautiful white flowers but the flower is never defiled with a muddy colour, it always remains white. Even though the pond becomes muddier, the lotus blooms more pure white flowers. This example symbolizes human struggle and the salvation of the Lotus Sutra. A muddy pond means a degenerated human society. A pure white flower means enlightenment. Although this world is corrupt and deeply defiled; as long as you hold the Lotus Sutra, you will never be corrupted, but achieve a calm state of enlightenment and together we will be able to transform this world into an ideal pure land.

Therefore, the lotus symbolizes an amazing teaching of the Lotus Sutra. This is that we, and all beings, have a Buddha nature. Generally, most plants seed after blooming, but the lotus has already seeded when the flower has bloomed. This shows that we, human beings, were born with the seed of the Buddha nature originally. Therefore, by the seed we can achieve enlightenment like the Buddha. Again, this shows a primary teaching of the Lotus Sutra “We already have a seed of Buddha”.

As a foundation of the teaching, the Lotus Sutra gives us a new concept of religion. It was expounded 2500 years ago that “This world can be a pure land or an ideal world”. We tend to complain about this world, seeing it as a corrupted human world and people want to give up the real world, and expect a pure land in another world after death. However, the Lotus Sutra teaches us, the pure land is neither another world nor a place to go to after death. “Here is the ideal world, the pure land and heaven”. When there are complaints about this world being a corrupted human world, haven’t you ever thought or wondered who made it like this? In fact, it was “us”. We human beings corrupted this world. This world is innocent. If such human beings were to move to an ideal world, they would definitely corrupt the world again and it would be just as they describe this world. Unless we improve our minds and purify our spirits, we will repeat the same behaviour and end up with the same results no matter where we live.

We were born with a seed of Buddha nature, but we haven’t yet awakened the seed by ourselves. Therefore, when we have troubles, we try to resolve anger with anger.

When we are suffering, we try to heal the suffering with suffering. We are pitied because of ignorance. We need the teaching of enlightenment. We should awaken the seed of Buddha nature in our mind and make the seed sprout and cultivate the Buddha nature, because our spirits can be purified through individual enlightenments.

The last word, “Kyo” comes from the Sanskrit “Sutra” which means “Teaching and Scripture”. However, under the Lotus Sutra the word of “Sutra” has another meaning which is “Concentrated essence of all teachings into one” and these add up to “The King of all Sutras”.

While Odaimoku consists of only seven letters, when you chant Odaimoku with all your faith, you will receive many of the Buddha’s rewards. Tradition says that when you chant Odaimoku faithfully, all gods and goddesses gather around you, tempted by the sound of the universal teaching. They will listen to your chanting and protect you from any harm. This comes from an episode when the Buddha achieved perfect enlightenment- a god, who is the creator of the universe, appeared in front of the Buddha and requested the Buddha to teach about His enlightenment. They might be almighty, but they are thirsty for universal enlightenment.

The sound of chanting Odaimoku echoes deeply into our mind and stimulates our mind to wake up the seed of the Buddha nature. Awakened, our Buddha nature will lead us to enlightenment and respond to the eternal Buddha. We will be able to receive the Buddha’s rewards automatically: wisdom, enlightenment, compassion, healing and supernatural powers.

The Odaimoku, when you face difficulties, will lead you to a path to overcome these difficulties; when you have many troubles, it will lead you to a path to show what the cause of your suffering is; and when your life is being life threatened, it will lead you to a secure place unconsciously. Also, the Lotus Sutra has a mystical power to save deceased spirits. At a funeral or memorial service, chanted Odaimoku by attendees transfers their rewards to the deceased spirits to make them calm and peaceful.

Even though you know about Odaimoku, if you don’t chant Odaimoku, it is the same as if you don’t know the Odaimoku at all. You will only come to realize how wonderful and beneficial chanting is after you have chanted. Please open your mind peacefully and try to chant, even ten times a day, faithfully. Odaimoku is the key to open your stored treasures. Please keep the precious key with you always.

Gassho.

Thank you very much for your donations.