

What is the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin?

This Buddhism was taught by Nichiren Daishonin, a 13th Century Japanese priest whose philosophy centred around one of the last teachings of the first historically recognised Buddha (known as Siddhartha Gautama or Shakyamuni Buddha). This teaching, called the Lotus Sutra, declares that all living beings, regardless of gender, race or intelligence, have the potential to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

To attain Buddhahood is to be awakened to the true nature of life, including the profound realisation of the interconnectedness of all things - the inseparable relationship between the individual and the environment and the ability of each human being to powerfully influence both. This realisation leads the individual to assume personal responsibility for her or his own circumstances and for that of the immediate and distant environment.

This responsibility is furthered by an understanding of the simultaneity of cause and effect. Each thought, word or deed has an immediate effect both on the individual and on his or her environment, even if the effect takes time to manifest.

The goal of SGI (see later for details) members is to manifest Buddhahood, or enlightenment, in their own lives, which will enable them to tap into their potential as individuals and, in so doing, create a better life for themselves and those around them. The eventual goal is, through the gradual "human revolution" of individuals, to create peace and prosperity in societies throughout the world.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

Nichiren taught that all of the benefits of the wisdom contained in the Lotus Sutra can be realised by chanting its title (Nam) Myoho Renge Kyo. Chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo therefore is the very heart of this Buddhist practice.

The Gohonzon

Toward the end of his life Nichiren inscribed a scroll which he called the fundamental object of respect, or Gohonzon. The scroll depicts in Chinese characters the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the life of Nichiren, as well as protective influences. Down the centre are the characters Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and Nichiren's signature. This indicates the oneness of the person and the Law - that the condition of Buddhahood is a potential within and can be manifested by all people. SGI members enshrine a copy of the Gohonzon in their homes as a focal point for their daily practice. The Gohonzon's power comes from the worshipper's faith - it functions as a spiritual mirror. Sitting in front of it and chanting, a person is able to recognise and reveal his or her own Buddha nature, the creative essence of life.

Daily Practice - Gongyo

The Japanese word gongyo literally means "assiduous practice. In the practice of Nichiren Buddhism it means reciting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and part of the second chapter "Hoben" and the sixteenth "Juryo" chapter of the Lotus Sutra in front of the Gohonzon. This is the fundamental practice of Nichiren Buddhism.

SGI (Soka Gakkai International)

In 1930, a lay organisation was founded by educator Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. During World War II, he was imprisoned for refusing to compromise his religious beliefs in spite of pressure from the Japanese government to accept the State religion, Shinto, which was used to unify the public in support of the war. Makiguchi died in prison in 1944. His successor, Josei Toda, was also imprisoned, but survived to help lead the post-war growth of the Soka Gakkai ("Value Creation Society") from a handful of members to more than 750,000 households before his death in 1958. The third President, Daisaku Ikeda, has guided the movement to its present day strength of approximately 20 million members world-wide. The international organisation, Soka Gakkai International (SGI), was established in 1975.