

## Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

Friends or acquaintances curious about Nichiren Buddhism often ask what Nam-myoho-renge-kyo means. This is a very important and difficult question, one that cannot really be answered in a brief or cursory way. It's best to consider what Nichiren Daishonin himself said about this.

Nichiren tells us, "There is no true happiness for human beings other than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" ("Happiness in This World," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 681). He goes on to explain that while life is naturally filled with joy and suffering, ups and downs, there is a deeper and more enduring happiness. This he calls the "boundless joy of the Law" (WND-1, 681) that underlies and supersedes the cycles of temporary happiness and suffering all people experience.

He identified the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the means to establish a deep-seated, enduring and genuine happiness.

### The Title of the Lotus Sutra

In his writings and recorded oral teachings, Nichiren Daishonin comments in detail and from various perspectives on the meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

First, the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni Buddha's highest teaching, is Myoho-renge-kyo.

The Lotus Sutra's Sanskrit title is *Saddharma-pundarika-sutra*. The renowned fourth-century Buddhist scholar and translator Kumarajiva fully grasped the meaning behind the Lotus Sutra's title and translated it from Sanskrit into Chinese as *Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching*. In Japanese, these Chinese characters are pronounced Myoho-renge-kyo.

To Nichiren, this phrase signified something far beyond being simply the title of a Buddhist text. It was the principle, or Law, at the very heart and core of the sutra's teaching. He added *nam* to Myohorenge-kyo and set forth the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as the practice to accord one's life with this Law, which he identified as the law of life itself.

*Nam* comes from the Sanskrit word *namas*, which was translated in Chinese and Japanese as meaning "to dedicate one's life." "Dedication," Nichiren says, means "dedication to the principle of eternal and unchanging truth" (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 3). And "life" indicates that, when dedicated to this principle, our lives become based on wisdom that perceives that truth and functions in response to any changing circumstance.

What does this mean to us? When we live our lives based on Myohorenge-kyo, the Mystic Law—the ultimate truth or law of life—we exhibit the wisdom to deal effectively with any situation, creating the most valuable outcome.

Nichiren says, "We may also note that the *nam* of Nam-myohorenge-kyo is a Sanskrit word, while *myoho*, *renge*, and *kyo* are Chinese words" (OTT, 3). He suggests here that the teaching of Nam-myohorenge-kyo is not limited to any one language or culture. For Nichiren, in thirteenth-century Japan, Sanskrit represented the cultures and languages of the Western world, while Chinese represented those of the East. As a merging of the languages of East and West, Nam-myohorenge-kyo is a phrase that represents the voices of all humanity, a universal teaching.

Nichiren practiced this principle exactly as taught in the Lotus Sutra and spread it for the happiness of all human beings. In doing so, he encountered harsh persecutions, as the Lotus Sutra predicted would befall its votary, or correct and devoted practitioner. In this sense, he "read" the Lotus Sutra with his entire life, fully realizing a state of oneness with the essential law or truth of life, Myohorenge-kyo. This

is what he means when he writes, “The Buddha’s will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-rence-kyo” (“Reply to Kyo’o,” WND-1, 412).

Because he was the first to manifest this Law in his life for the sake of all people, Nichiren Daishonin is respected as the true Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

## What Is the Meaning of Myoho-rence-kyo?

In brief, *myo* of *myoho* means “wonderful” or “mystic,” and *ho* means “law,” “principle,” “teaching” or “phenomena.” Together, *myoho* is translated as “Wonderful Law” or “Mystic Law.” Nichiren Daishonin says: “*Myo* stands for the Dharma nature or enlightenment, while *ho* represents darkness or ignorance. Together *myoho* expresses the idea that ignorance and the Dharma nature are a single entity” (OTT, 4). *Myoho*, then, expresses both the enlightened nature of a Buddha and the deluded nature of an ordinary person, and the fact that they are essentially one.

While most Buddhist schools see a huge difference between a Buddha and an ordinary person, Nichiren aimed to erase any idea of separation between the two. For instance, in “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” he writes: “Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpas ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another. To chant Myoho-rence-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death” (WND-1, 216).

He also writes, “*Myo* represents death, and *ho*, life” (WND-1, 216). And in “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” he writes, “*Myo* is the name given to the mystic nature of life, and *ho*, to its manifestations” (WND-1, 4). Hence, *myoho* is also the essence of life itself that is manifest while one is alive and continues in a latent state in death.

*Renge*, literally “lotus flower,” also has a profound meaning in Nichiren Buddhism. Because the lotus produces both flower and seeds at the same time, it illustrates the principle of the “simultaneity of cause and effect.” In other words, flower and seed, cause and effect, Nichiren says, are a “single entity” (OTT, 4).

Here, “cause” refers to the efforts or practice one carries out with the aim of becoming a Buddha, and “effect,” to the actual attainment of Buddhahood. The simultaneity of cause and effect means that the very moment we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the intention of improving our lives, the life condition of Buddhahood, imbued with courage, compassion and wisdom, emerges within us and guides our actions.

The final character, *kyo*, Nichiren describes as the “words and voices of all living beings” (OTT, 4). *Kyo*, meaning “sutra” or “teaching,” indicates the teaching the Buddha expounded with his voice. Nichiren explains, “The voice carries out the work of the Buddha, and this is called *kyo*, or sutra” (OTT, 4). This means that our voices when chanting or speaking to others about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo resonate with and stimulate the Buddha nature within us, within others and in our environment.

There are many other perspectives from which Nichiren explains the meaning and significance of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Most important, though, is to remember that it signifies dedicating our lives to the Mystic Law. Acting based upon that Law, we work for the happiness of ourselves and others.

Nichiren says that, while Nam-myoho-renge-kyo was known by Buddhist teachers of the past, they did not teach it to others or spread it widely. He writes: “Now, however, we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, and the daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] that I, Nichiren, chant is different from that of earlier ages. This Nam-myoho-renge-kyo encompasses both practice for oneself and the teaching of others” (“On the Receiving of the Three Great Secret Laws,” WND-2, 986).

## What Should We Keep in Mind While We Chant?

In Nichiren Buddhism, action is most important. Only by taking action and applying our Buddhist practice to our day-to-day challenges can we demonstrate the real power of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This becomes apparent through our character, our benefits and our victories in life.

Nichiren Daishonin says that in chanting, faith, or one's heart, is what is important (see "The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra," WND-1, 1000). This means to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with firm conviction in our own limitless potential and that of others, determined to bring about our own happiness as well as the happiness of others just as Nichiren taught. When we do so, we will see clear proof of the power of the Mystic Law in our lives.

SGI President Ikeda states: "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo . . . directs us on a course to absolute victory. Nichiren Buddhism enables us to develop a serene life state of inner abundance pervaded by the noble virtues of eternity, happiness, true self and purity. Those who embrace faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo possess far, far greater wealth than those who have the most staggering fortunes or the most luxurious mansions. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the life and fundamental law of the universe. When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we have nothing to worry about. The Daishonin's words are never false. The purpose of our faith and practice is to achieve happiness and victory in our lives. This is the reality of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, the one and eternal Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law" (March 5, 2010, *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Under President Ikeda's leadership, SGI members have been earnestly dedicated to kosen-rufu—the worldwide spread of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—just as Nichiren Daishonin taught. As a result, they have been showing proof of its beneficial power for the sake of humanity on a global scale.