

FIFTEEN [POSSIBLE] DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF NICHIREN BUDDHISM

(IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER)
2005

The purpose of this material is to stimulate dialogue on the ways in which Nichiren Buddhism might be distinguished from other philosophies. While other forms of Buddhism may also resonate with one (or more) of these features, taken together these fifteen features attempt to express a complete picture of Nichiren's system of thought. Clearly, this is a work in progress, and is not an official SGI-USA resource. Additions, clarifications, corrections, and general musings are all greatly appreciated by the author, who is solely responsible for its content. Please contact Diana Elrod for more information: 415-626-4688 or Diana_Elrod@sbcglobal.net

1. INVOKING THE MYSTIC LAW BY CHANTING NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO

If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. Chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life.

Nichiren Daishonin, "On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime," WND p. 3.

2. MEN AND WOMEN ARE EQUAL

Turning to the Buddhist scriptures, we find that, because the more than five thousand or seven thousand volumes of Hinayana and Mahayana sutras teach that it is impossible for women to attain Buddhahood, it is impossible to repay the debt owed to our mother. The Hinayana teachings flatly deny that a woman can attain Buddhahood. The Mahayana sutras in some cases seem to say that a woman may be reborn in a pure land, but this is simply a possibility mentioned by the Buddha, and no example of such a thing actually having happened are given.

Since I have realized that only the Lotus Sutra teaches the attainment of Buddhahood by women, and that only the Lotus is the sutra of true requital for repaying the kindness of our mother, in order to pay my debt of gratitude to my mother, I have vowed to enable all women to chant the daimoku of this sutra.

Nichiren Daishonin, "The Sutra of True Requital," WND p. 931.

3. A PRACTICE FOR ANYONE/EVERYONE IS EQUALLY ABLE TO AWAKEN

Even an ignorant person can obtain blessings by serving someone who expounds the Lotus Sutra. No matter if he is a demon or an animal, if someone proclaims even a single verse or phrase of the Lotus Sutra, you must respect him as you would the Buddha. This is what the sutra means when it says, "You should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect as you would a Buddha." You should respect one another as Shakyamuni and Many Treasures did at the ceremony in the "Treasure Tower" chapter.

Nichiren Daishonin, "The Fourteen Slanders," WND p. 757.

4. LOTUS SUTRA IS THE HIGHEST TEACHING

The Lotus Sutra is the king of sutras, true and correct in both word and principle. Its words are the ultimate reality, and this reality is the Mystic Law (*myoho*). It is called the Mystic Law because it reveals the principle of the mutually inclusive relationship of a single moment of life and all phenomena. That is why this sutra is the wisdom of all Buddhas.

Nichiren Daishonin, "On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime," WND p. 3.

5. CHANGING KARMA IN THIS LIFETIME

The benefit of all the other sutras is uncertain, because they teach that one must first make good causes and only then can one become a Buddha at some later time. With regard to the Lotus Sutra, when one takes it up, that hand immediately attains Buddhahood, and when one's mouth chants it, that mouth is itself a Buddha, as, for example, the moon is reflected in the water the moment it appears from behind the eastern mountains, or as a sound and its echo arise simultaneously.

Nichiren Daishonin, "Wu-lung and I-lung," WND p. 1099.

6. THE SUPREMACY OF CAUSE AND EFFECT: ICHINEN SANZEN IN PRACTICE

Whether you chant the Buddha's name, recite the sutra, or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits and roots of goodness in your life. With this conviction you should strive in faith.

Nichiren Daishonin, "On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime," WND p. 4.

7. ENLIGHTENMENT AS WE ARE

The heart of the Lotus Sutra is the revelation that one may attain supreme enlightenment in one's present form without altering one's status as an ordinary person. This means that without casting aside one's karmic impediments one can still attain the Buddha way. Thus T'ien-t'ai said, "The other sutras only predict Buddhahood...for the good, but not for the evil; This [Lotus] sutra predicts Buddhahood for all."

Nichiren Daishonin, "On Reply to Hakiri Saburo," WND p. 410.

8. EARTHLY DESIRES ARE ENLIGHTENMENT

Be resolved to summon forth the great power of faith, and chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo with the prayer that your faith will be steadfast and correct at the moment of death. Never seek any other way to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death, and manifest it in your life. Only then will you realize that earthly desires are enlightenment, and that the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana. Even embracing the Lotus Sutra would be useless without the heritage of faith.

Nichiren Daishonin, "The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life," WND p. 218.

9. PRACTICE FOR SELF AND OTHERS

I will teach you how to become a Buddha easily. Teaching another something is the same as oiling the wheels of a cart so that they turn even though it is heavy, or as floating a boat on water so that it moves ahead easily. The way to become a Buddha easily is nothing special. It is the same as giving water to a thirsty person in a time of drought, or as providing fire for a person freezing in the cold. Or again, it is the same as giving another something that is one of a kind, or as offering something as alms to another even at the risk of one's life.

Nichiren Daishonin, "The Wealthy Man Sudatta," WND p. 1086.

10. MUTUAL POSSESSION OF THE TEN WORLDS

Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside oneself; both lie only within one's own heart. Awakened to this, one is called a Buddha; deluded about it, one is called an ordinary person. The Lotus Sutra reveals this truth, and one who embraces the Lotus Sutra will realize that hell is itself the Land of Tranquil Light.

Nichiren Daishonin, "The Hell is the Land of Tranquil Light," WND p. 456.

11. THE BUDDHA IS WITHIN/ORIGINAL ENLIGHTENMENT

We ordinary beings are fettered by evil karma, earthly desires, and the sufferings of birth and death. But due to the three inherent potentials of the Buddha nature—innate Buddhahood, the

wisdom to perceive it, and the actions to manifest it – we can without doubt reveal the Buddha’s three bodies – the Dharma body, the reward body, and the manifested body.

Nichiren Daishonin, “The One Essential Phrase,” WND p. 923.

12. THE ONENESS OF SELF AND ENVIRONMENT/ESHO FUNI

T’ien-t’ai says that one should understand that living beings and their environments, and the causes and effects at work within them, are all the Law of *rengé* (the lotus). Here “living beings and their environments” means the phenomena of life and death. Thus it is clear that, where life and death exist, cause and effect, or the Law of the lotus, is at work.

Nichiren Daishonin, “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” WND p. 216.

13. THE GOHONZON AS THE OBJECT OF DEVOTION

I am entrusting you with the Gohonzon for the protection of your young child. This Gohonzon is the essence of the Lotus Sutra and the eye of all the scriptures. It is like the sun and the moon in the heavens, a great ruler on earth, the heart in a human being, the wish-granting jewel among treasures, and the pillar of a house.

When we have this mandala with us, it is a rule that all the Buddhas and gods will gather round and watch over us, protecting us like a shadow day and night, just as warriors guard their ruler, as parents love their children, as fish rely on water, as trees and grasses crave rain, and as birds depend on trees. You must trust in it with all your heart.

Nichiren Daishonin, “On Upholding Faith in the Gohonzon,” WND p. 624.

14. SHAKUBUKU: COMPASSIONATELY LEADING PEOPLE TO THE TRUTH

When one must face enemies, one needs a sword, a stick or a bow and arrows. When one has no enemies, however, such weapons are of no use at all. In this age, the provisional teachings have turned into enemies of the true teaching. When the time is right to propagate the teaching of the one vehicle, the provisional teachings become enemies. When they are a source of confusion, they must be thoroughly refuted from the standpoint of the true teaching. Of the two types of practice, this is shakubuku, the practice of the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Daishonin, “On Practicing the Buddha’s Teachings,” WND p. 394.

15. ACTUAL PROOF IS SUPERIOR TO OTHER PROOFS

In judging the relative merit of Buddhist doctrines, I, Nichiren, believe that the best standards are those of reason and documentary proof. And even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact.

Nichiren Daishonin, “Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain,” WND p. 599.