

Translation of Gongyo, the liturgy of Nichiren Daishonin

Two and a half thousand years ago, towards the end of his life, the Buddha Shakyamuni expounded the Lotus Sutra. Centuries later, it was the starting and ending point for all Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, and remains the profound foundation for the practice and study of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism today. Twice a day in the ceremony called Gongyo, SGI members recite excerpts from the 2nd and 16th chapters of this great Lotus Sutra, translated here.

If we are to believe these dying words of the Buddha, we must conclude that the Lotus Sutra is the only bright mirror we have, and that through it we can understand the heart of all the sutras. – *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin I*, 692

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 life and all phenomena. That is why this sutra is the wisdom of all Buddhas. – *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin I*, 3

The Lotus Sutra teaches of the great hidden treasure of the heart, as vast as the universe itself which dispels any feelings of powerlessness. It teaches a dynamic way of living in which we breathe the immense life of the universe itself. It teaches the true great adventure of self-reformation.

The Lotus Sutra has the breadth and scope to embrace all people on the way to peace. It has the fragrance of magnificent culture and art. It leads us to an unsurpassed state of life imbued with the qualities of eternity, happiness, true self and purity, so that wherever we are, we may say, “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil (*Lotus Sutra* 16, 230).

The Lotus Sutra has the drama of fighting for injustice against evil. It has a warmth that comforts the weary. It has a vibrant, pulsing courage that drives away fear. It has a chorus of joy at attaining absolute freedom throughout past, present and future. It has the soaring flight of liberty. It has brilliant light, flowers, greenery, music, paintings, vivid stories. It offers unsurpassed lessons on psychology, the workings of the human heart; lessons on life, lessons on happiness; and lessons on peace. It maps out the basic rules of good health. It awakens us to the universal truth that a change in one’s heart can transform everything. – Daisaku Ikeda, *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra I*, 14

The Lotus Sutra is one of the most important and influential of all the sutras or sacred scriptures of Mahayana Buddhism, revered by almost all branches of the Mahayana teachings, and over many centuries the object of intense veneration among Buddhist believers throughout China, Korea, Japan and other regions of eastern Asia. – Burton Watson, translator’s introduction to 1993 Columbia University Press/SGI edition of the Lotus Sutra

Expendient Means 'Hoben' Chapter

(1) Niji seson. Ju sanmai. Anjo ni ki. Go shari-hotsu. Sho-but^{chi}-e. Jinjin muryo. Go chi-e mon. Nange nannyu. Issai shomon. Hyaku-shi-but^{su}. Sho fu no chi.

At that time the World-Honoured One calmly arose from his samadhi and addressed Shariputra, saying: "The wisdom of the Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable. The door to this wisdom is difficult to understand and difficult to enter. Not one of the voice-hearers or pratyekabuddhas is able to comprehend it.

(2) Sho-i sha ga. Butsu zo shingon. Hyaku sen man noku. Mushu sho butsu. Jin gyo sho-but^{su}. Muryo doho. Yumyo shojin. Myosho fu mon. Joju jinjin. Mi-zo-u ho. Zui gi sho setsu. Ishu nange.

"What is the reason for this? A Buddha has personally attended a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million, a countless number of Buddhas and has fully carried out an immeasurable number of religious practices. He has exerted himself bravely and vigorously, and his name is universally known. He has realized the Law that is profound and never known before, and preaches it in accordance with what is appropriate, yet his intention is difficult to understand.

(3) Shari-hotsu. Go ju jo-butsum irai. Shuju innen. Shuju hiyu. Ko en gonkyo. Mu shu hoben. Indo shujo. Ryo ri sho jaku.

“Shariputra, ever since I attained Buddhahood I have through various causes and various similes widely expounded my teachings and have used countless expedient means to guide living beings and cause them to renounce attachments.

(4) Sho-i sha ga. Nyorai hoben. Chiken hara-mitsu. Kai i gu-soku.

“Why is this? Because the Thus Come One is fully possessed by both expedient means and the paramita of wisdom.

(5) Shari-hotsu. Nyorai chiken. Kodai jinnon. Muryo muge. Riki. Mu-sho-i. Zenjo. Gedas. Sanmai. Jin nyu musai. Joju issai. Mi-zo-u ho.

“Shariputra, the wisdom of the Thus Come One is expansive and profound. He has immeasurable [mercy], unlimited [eloquence], power, fearlessness, concentration, emancipation, and samadhis, and has deeply entered the boundless and awakened to the Law never before attained.

(6) Shari-hotsu. Nyorai no. Shuju fun-betsu. Gyo ses sho ho. Gonji nyunan. Ekka shushin. Shari-hotsu. Shu yo gon shi. Muryo muhen. Mi-zo-u ho. Bushitsu joju.

“Shariputra, the Thus Come One knows how to make

various kinds of distinctions and to expound the teachings skillfully. His words are soft and gentle and delight the hearts of the assembly. Shariputra, to sum it up: the Buddha has fully realized the Law that is limitless, boundless, never attained before.

(7) Shi shari-hotsu. Fu shu bu setsu. ^Sho-i sha ga. Bus^sho joju. Dai ichi ke-u. Nange shi ho.

“But stop, Shariputra, I will say no more. Why? Because what the Buddha has achieved is the rarest and most difficult-to-understand Law.

(8) Yui butsu yo butsu. Nai no kujin. Shoho jisso. Sho-i shoho. Nyo ze so. Nyo ze sho. Nyo ze tai. Nyo ze riki. Nyo ze sa. Nyo ze in. Nyo ze en. Nyo ze ka. Nyo ze ho. Nyo ze honmak^kukyo to.

“The true entity of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, inherent cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end.”

Life Span 'Juryo' Chapter

(1) Ji ga toku bur[^]rai. Sho kyo sho kosshu. Muryo hyaku sen man. Oku sai asogi. Jo seppo kyoke Mushu oku shujo. Ryo nyu o butsu-do. Nirai muryo ko.

“Since I attained Buddhahood
the number of kalpas that have passed
is an immeasurable hundreds, thousands, ten thousands,
millions, trillions, asamkhyas.
Constantly I have preached the Law, teaching, converting
countless millions of living beings,
causing them to enter the Buddha way,
all this for immeasurable kalpas.

(2) I do shujo ko. Hoben gen nehan. Ni jitsu fu metsu-do. Jo ju shi seppo.

“In order to save living beings,
as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana
but in truth I do not pass into extinction.
I am always here preaching the Law.

(3) Ga jo ju o shi. I sho jin-zu-riki. Ryo tendo shujo. Sui gon ni fu ken.

“I am always here,
but through my transcendental powers
I make it so that living beings in their befuddlement
do not see me even when close by.

(4) Shu ken ga metsu-do. Ko kuyo shari. Gen kai e

renbo. Ni sho katsu-go shin.

“When the multitude see that I have passed into
extinction,
far and wide they offer alms to my relics.
All harbor thoughts of yearning
and in their minds thirst to gaze at me.

**(5) Shujo ki shin-buku. Shichi-jiki i nyunan. Isshin
yok^ken butsu. Fu ji shaku shinmyo. Ji ga gyu
shuso. Ku shutsu ryojusen.**

“When living beings have become truly faithful,
honest and upright, gentle in intent,
single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha
not hesitating even if it costs them their lives,
then I and the assembly of monks
appear together on Holy Eagle Peak.

**(6) Ga ji go shujo. Jo zai shi fu-metsu. I hoben-
rik^ko. Gen u metsu fu-metsu. Yo-koku u shujo.
Kugyo shingyo sha. Ga bu o hi chu. I setsu mujo ho.**

“At that time I tell the living beings
that I am always here, never entering extinction,
but that because of the power of an expedient means
at times I appear to be extinct, at other times not,
and that if there are living beings in other lands
who are reverent and sincere in their wish to believe,
then among them too
I will preach the unsurpassed Law.

**(7) Nyoto fu mon shi. Tan ni ga metsu-do. Ga ken
sho shujo. Motsu-zai o kukai. Ko fu i gen shin. Ryo**

go sho katsu-go. In go shin renbo. Nai shutsu i seppo.

“But you have not heard of this,
so you suppose that I enter extinction.
When I look at living beings
I see them drowned in a sea of suffering;
therefore I do not show myself,
causing them to thirst for me.
Then when their minds are filled with yearning,
at last I appear and preach the Law for them.

**(8) Jin-zu riki nyo ze. O asogi ko. Jo zai ryo jusen.
Gyu yo sho jusho. Shuju ken ko jin. Dai ka sho sho ji.
Ga shi do annon. Tennin jo juman. Onrin sho do-
kaku. Shuju ho Shogon. Hoju ta keka. Shuju sho yu-
raku. Shoten gyaku tenku. Jo sas^shu gi-gaku. U
mandara ke. San butsu gyu daishu. Ga jodo fu ki. Ni
shu ken sho jin. Ufu sho kuno. Nyo ze shitsu juman.**

“Such are my transcendental powers.
For asamkhya kalpas
constantly I have dwelled on Holy Eagle Peak
and in various other places.
When living beings witness the end of a kalpa
and all is consumed in a great fire,
this, my land, remains safe and tranquil,
constantly filled with heavenly and human beings.
The halls and pavilions in its gardens and groves
are adorned with various kinds of gems.
Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit
where living beings enjoy themselves at ease.
The gods strike heavenly drums,
constantly making many kinds of music.

Mandarava blossoms rain down,
scattering over the Buddha and the great assembly.
My pure land is not destroyed,
yet the multitude see it as consumed in fire,
with anxiety, fear and other sufferings
filling it everywhere.

**(9) Ze sho zai shujo. I aku-go innen. Ka asogi ko. Fu
mon sanbo myo.**

“These living beings with their various offenses,
through causes arising from their evil actions,
spend asamkhya kalpas
without hearing the name of the Three Treasures.

**(10) Sho u shu ku-doku. Nyuwa shichi-jiki sha.
Sokkai ken gashin. Zai shi ni seppo. Waku-ji i shi
shu. Setsu butsu-ju muryo. Ku nai ken bussha. I
setsu butsu nan chi.**

“But those who practice meritorious ways,
who are gentle, peaceful, honest and upright,
all of them will see me
here in person, preaching the Law.
At times for this multitude
I describe the Buddha's life span as immeasurable,
and to those who see the Buddha only after a long time
I explain how difficult it is to meet the Buddha.

**(11) Ga chi-riki nyo ze. Eko sho muryo. Jumyo
mushu ko. Ku shugo sho toku.**

“Such is the power of my wisdom
that its sagacious beams shine without measure.

This life span of countless kalpas
I gained as the result of lengthy practice.

**(12) Nyoto u chi sha. Mot^to shi sho gi. To dan ryo
yo jin. Butsu-go jip^puko. Nyo i zen hoben. I ji o shi
ko. Jitsu zai ni gon shi. Mu no sek^komo. Ga yaku i
se bu. Ku sho kugen sha.**

“You who are possessed of wisdom,
entertain no doubts on this point!
Cast them off, end them forever,
for the Buddha's words are true, not false.
He is like a skilled physician
who uses an expedient means to cure his deranged sons.
Though in fact alive, he gives out word he is dead,
yet no one can say he speaks falsely.
I am the father of this world,
saving those who suffer and are afflicted.

**(13) I bonbu tendo. Jitsu zai ni gon metsu. I joken ga
ko. Ni sho kyoshi shin. Ho-itsu jaku go-yoku. Da o
aku-do chu. Ga jo chi shujo. Gyo do fu gyo do. Zui o
sho ka do. I ses^shuju ho.**

“Because of the befuddlement of ordinary people,
though I live, I give out word I have entered extinction.
For if they see me constantly,
arrogance and selfishness arise in their minds.
Abandoning restraint, they give themselves up to the
five desires
and fall into the evil paths of existence.
Always I am aware of which living beings
practice the way, and which do not,
and in response to their needs for salvation

I preach various doctrines for them.

(14) Mai ji sa ze nen. I ga ryo shujo. Toku nyu mu-jo do. Soku joju busshin.

“At all times I think to myself:
How can I cause living beings
to gain entry into the unsurpassed way
and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?”

Guide to Sanskrit and other terms

(adapted from *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*.)

samadhi – State of intense concentration of mind, or meditation, said to produce a sense of inner serenity

pratyekabuddhas – Self-awakened ones

Sariputra – One of Shakyamuni’s ten major disciples, known as foremost in wisdom

Thus Come One – One of the ten honourable titles of a Buddha, meaning one who has come from the realm of truth

kalpa – A very, very, very long period of time, starting with small kalpas at 16 million years

asamkhyā – Innumerable; ancient Indian writings refer to 10^{31} , or 10^{59}

nirvana – Enlightenment, the goal of Buddhist practice. In Mahayana Buddhism, not an exit from the phenomenal world, but an awakening to the true nature of phenomena

Three Treasures – The Buddha, the Law, and the Order (community of believers)

Source for text

The Lotus Sutra, translated by Burton Watson (Columbia University Press: New York 1993. ISBN 0-231-08160-X), also available online at www.sgi-usa.org.

