

In terms of our lives, this means that we are the result of causes and conditions brought about by our own actions together with the impact of our environment. What we are today is a result of what we have thought and done in the past, and what we shall be in the future is a result of what we think and do in the present.



Statue of Nichiren Shōnin

Through ignorance of the law of karma, people trap themselves in a vicious circle of suffering, pursuing objectives which can never bring lasting self-satisfaction. Nichiren Shū Buddhism, however, provides a path that enables all people to overcome suffering, lead happy lives and help others to do the same by practicing the essential teaching of Sakyamuni Buddha as contained in the Lotus Sutra.



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Nichiren Shū Buddhism

Nichiren Buddhist International Center



What is the Nichiren Shū?

The Nichiren Shū is a Buddhist lineage that was founded 750 years ago. “Nichiren” is the name of the founder. “Shū” simply means “school.” Nichiren Shū’s mission is to propagate the essential truth of Buddhism in accordance with the teaching of the revered priest Nichiren.

Nichiren Shōnin lived in Japan from 1222-1282. His name means “Sun Lotus,” and he was given the title “Shōnin,” which means “revered priest.” Nichiren Shōnin was a great teacher and reformer who rejected the reservation of Buddhism to an elite class and restored Buddhism as a practice for common ordinary people.

Nichiren Shōnin based his teachings on *the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma*, (also known simply as *the Lotus Sutra*). In his many years of study, Nichiren Shōnin found that the Lotus Sutra was the culmination of Sakyamuni Buddha’s teachings wherein the ultimate truth of Buddhism is clearly expounded.

What is Buddhism?

Buddhism is the universal teaching of enlightenment to the true nature of life based upon the law of cause and effect (karma). Basically, the law of karma means that phenomena appear and disappear as result of causes and conditions.

What are the essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra?

The Wonderful Dharma (Truth) of the Lotus Sutra is that all living beings, whether they realize it or not, have the capacity to become enlightened. Everyone, without exception, can unlock the perfect wisdom and great compassion that reside in the depths of life. The Lotus Sutra also teaches that the life of a Buddha transcends our ordinary way of thinking and is beyond birth and death.



The Great Mandala by
Nichiren Shōnin

Sakyamuni Buddha himself is in actuality the Eternal Buddha who is always present in our lives, leading us to the realization of our own innate Buddhahood.

The sutra is named the Lotus Sutra because the lotus symbolizes the oneness of cause and effect, specifically the cause of aspiring to enlightenment (Buddhahood) and the effect of attaining it, since it is a flower which blooms and seeds at the same time. It also symbolizes the purity of Buddhahood blooming in the midst of our ordinary lives just as the lotus blossoms in muddy pond water.

How do you practice Nichiren Shū Buddhism?

Nichiren Shōnin provided all people with a way to understand and put into practice the true spirit of Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings. He taught three basic principles based upon the essential truths of the Lotus Sutra called the Three Great Hidden Dharmas and a simple yet profound practice based on those principles.

The Three Great Hidden Dharmas are:

1, The Essential Focus of Reverence (Gohonzon)

The Essential Focus of Reverence is the all encompassing life of the Eternal Buddha and not an object or thing. The Lotus Sutra teaches that Sakyamuni Buddha is none other than the historic embodiment of the timeless Buddha-nature in which all life participates, and which all beings are destined to realize as their own true



Mt. Minobu Kuonji Temple
Head temple of the Nichiren Shū

nature. The Great Mandala depicts this insight through the use of Chinese calligraphy.

2, The Sacred Title (Odaimoku)

In Shino-Japanese, the name of the Lotus Sutra is "Myoho Renge Kyo" which is the essence of the teachings of Sakyamuni Buddha. When the word "Namu," meaning "devotion," is added to the title it becomes "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" or "devotion to the Wonderful Truth of the Lotus Flower Teaching." Because the Odaimoku embodies the essence of the Lotus Sutra, the five characters, Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo contain all of the qualities of Buddhahood. This means that by the merit of Myoho Renge Kyo, we can attain Buddhahood by reciting "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" (devotion to the Wonderful Truth of the Lotus Flower Teaching).

3, The Precept Platform (Kaidan)

The Precept Platform is considered any place where one chants the Odaimoku, thereby basing one's life upon the true spirit of Sakyamuni Buddha's teachings. Traditionally, the Kaidan was the place where one made formal vows to follow the precepts of Buddhism as a member of the clergy. Nichiren Shōnin, however, universalized the concept of the Kaidan so that all people could uphold the essential teaching and practice of the Lotus Sutra at all times through chanting Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.

In order to put these three principles or Three Great Hidden Dharmas into practice, Nichiren Buddhists regularly recite selections from the Lotus Sutra and chant the Odaimoku in the presence of the Gohonzon at the beginning and at the end of the day. In doing this we remind ourselves that the Eternal Sakyamuni Buddha is continuously transferring the Dharma to us so that every moment is an awakening to the Truth. By faithfully following this teaching and practice, Nichiren Buddhists are able to make the cause that will enable them to manifest the perfect wisdom and great compassion of the Buddha in all circumstances and transform not only their own lives but even the lives of others, so that this world can cease to be a world of suffering and become a pure land of peace and tranquility.

