An Outline of the Lotus Sutra
(Source Lectures on the Sutra: The Hoben and Juryo Chapters)

A tremendous number of Buddhist sutras have been handed down to us, so many, in fact, that they are known as the eighty thousand or eighty-four thousand teachings. We might wonder how there came to be so many, or indeed, why so many were even necessary. The works of Nichiren Daishonin, however, provide the clue to this puzzle. In the "Sanze Shobutsu Sokannon Sho" (On the Teachings Affirmed by All Buddhas throughout Time), he states: "The eighty-four thousand teachings are the diary of one's own being." (Gosho Zenshu, p. 563.). The sutras each elucidate different aspects of human existence, which is one with cosmic life. Taken together, they clarify life in its totality.

Suppose a person were to start keeping a diary in elementary school, describing his thoughts and feelings each day in as much detail as he could. Eventually a full record of all the conscious experiences of his life would unfold. In twenty years this diary would have filled hundreds of notebooks. Were the diarist also able to record the flow of his subconscious, the notebooks would form a pile a mountain high. Buddhism aims to illuminate the principles at work in all things in the universe from the infinite past into the eternal future, so it is easy to see why so many scriptures were recorded.

The sheer volume of these scriptures can be as bewildering as a tropical jungle, where, in some places, not even the sun can penetrate and no path can be found. For the person who wanders into it, it is difficult to find one's way without an accurate compass to indicate exactly where he is and in what direction he is going. In the search for the compass that will successfully guide us through the dense forest of Buddhist doctrine, it is crucial to remember that Buddhism deals with the human condition. No matter how fantastic or magnificent a particular story in some sutra may be, it is always referring to some aspect of our own existence. If, throughout our study of the vast system of Buddhist philosophy, we remain aware of this truth, we can more readily understand its teachings.

In his "Moko Tsukai Gosho" (On the Mongol Emissary), Nichiren Daishonin clearly describes the wisdom of Buddhism: "In the final analysis, all phenomena are contained within one's own life, even down to the last particle of dust. The nine great mountain ranges and the eight vast seas are contained within one's body, and the sun, the moon and the stars are contained within one's life. Yet people do not realize this any more than blind men are able to see their own reflections in the mirror. They are like babies too ignorant to fear either fire or water." (Gosho Zenshu, p. 1473) This passage tells us that all phenomena, all laws, all heavenly bodies-in fact, all existences in the universe-are encompassed by each individual's life. We may wonder how that could be possible, but Western thought is not without parallels. C. G. Jung's term, "collective unconscious," for example, by which he attempted to describe the collective repository containing all human memories, approaches the Buddhist concept of cosmic life.

Every individual life possesses the same intrinsic power and wisdom permeating the universe itself. Each life is filled with an enormous dynamic energy sufficient to influence even the macrocosm. Nevertheless, most people are unable to recognize this fundamental current of life pervading all things. The teachings of Buddhism expound the way to tap that fundamental life force. They provide insights into the true nature of life and the universe as it really is.

Now that we have our compass, let us step into the jungle and explore the essential differences between the Lotus Sutra and the other scriptures. In the "Moko Tsukai Gosho," Nichiren Daishonin gives a clear-cut guideline: "The texts of non-Buddhist philosophies and the Hinayana and provisional Mahayana scriptures of Buddhism explain only partial aspects of the Law of life. They do not elucidate it fully as the Lotus Sutra does." (Ibid.) Buddhism classifies all teachings and philosophies into two major groups: Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Buddhist doctrines are further divided into Hinayana, provisional Mahayana and true Mahayana-the last being the Lotus Sutra itself. All scriptures and systems of thought other than the Lotus Sutra explain "only partial aspects" of the Law of life. In other words, not even the teachings of Hinayana or provisional Mahayana Buddhism elucidate the most profound dimension of human life fully.

This is reminiscent of the story of the three blind men who tried to describe an elephant. One touched the elephant's leg and said that it was like a large tree. Another felt its ear and described it as a big fan. The third, after running his fingers over its belly, insisted that it was like a wall. They were correct about the particular areas they had felt, but their overall picture was entirely wrong. They had insufficient information to talk about the animal as a whole.

Shakyamuni, the historical founder of Buddhism, was the son of King Shuddhodana, ruler of the Shakya clan, which constituted one of several minor kingdoms of the time. Shakya of Shakyamuni comes from the name of the tribe in which he was born; muni means "sage" or "saint." At birth he was named Gautama Siddhartha by his parents, Gautama being the
family name and Siddhartha his given name, meaning "one who has achieved the goal." (Some scholars believe that the name Siddhartha was given to him by later followers, in honor of the enlightenment he attained.) Siddhartha was a perceptive youth, realizing at an early age that he and all others were confronted equally by four inescapable sufferings—birth, old age, sickness and death. Although surrounded by wealth, Siddhartha was driven by an irresistible desire to find a solution to these existential problems. In pursuit of this goal he renounced his royal heritage, his luxurious surroundings and even abandoned his family. He began to pursue a life of self-denial in the ascetic tradition of his day. But after a long period of austerities, he found such efforts to be entirely useless. He returned to a moderate way of living and devoted himself to deep meditation until he finally attained enlightenment. Then, in order to transmit to all people the enlightenment he had achieved, he taught for fifty years, leaving a great body of teachings, now known collectively as Buddhism.

Before revealing the profound meaning of his enlightenment, Shakyamuni had to prepare his disciples thoroughly. The ultimate truth of Buddhism is far too difficult to grasp through the intellect alone, so the Buddha first cultivated the people's wisdom with preparatory teachings.

First, he asserted that people suffer in this world because they base their happiness or sense of self-identity on fleeting, uncertain phenomena, and mistake such temporary satisfactions for lasting happiness. He therefore sought to bring them face to face with the harsh truth that all worldly phenomena are impermanent and do not in themselves constitute a valid basis for happiness. He showed how futile it is to repeat the cycle of birth and death for lifetime after lifetime, vainly seeking happiness in things that by their very nature cannot last. The logical conclusion of these early teachings, which became the basis of Hinayana Buddhism, was that one could escape suffering only by relinquishing all desires for attachments to transient phenomena— even one's own body and mind. People were taught to seek emancipation from suffering through the total eradication of desire.

As his disciples began to understand his teachings in greater depth, Shakyamuni began to expound more profound views of life in what are called the provisional Mahayana teachings. But even the sutras of this period depict a great gap between ordinary human beings and the enlightened state. For example, some speak of the splendor of the Buddha land as another realm altogether apart from this trouble-ridden and transitory world. Various sutras speak of the eternal and happy Buddha lands to be found in the eastern or western part of the universe, and Shakyamuni's followers began to long for rebirth in such a heavenly paradise.

When Shakyamuni expounded his final teaching, later known as the Lotus Sutra, a radical change took place. He encouraged his disciples to perceive the true nature of their own lives, rather than yearn for some other world. Shakyamuni's first forty-two years of teaching can be looked upon as providing the preparatory doctrine, the means that lead people to the one Law, which was revealed in the final eight years of his teachings, those that became the Lotus Sutra.

The Lotus Sutra integrates all partial truths revealed in the earlier teachings into a perfect whole, and represents the essence and the entirety of the system of Buddhist philosophy. It approaches life both as a whole and in its minutest detail. That is, it deals both with the eternal, ultimate truth of life, and its ever-changing phenomenal manifestations. The Lotus Sutra, which illustrates the infinite potential of life through parables and descriptions of spectacular events such as the Ceremony in the Air, might well be called the culmination, or the apex, of Shakyamuni's teachings.

The **Muryogi** Sutra (Sutra of Infinite Meaning), which serves as an introduction to the Lotus Sutra, reads:

"Infinite meaning comes from the one Law." This indicates that all the teachings that came before the Lotus Sutra were based on the one Law, which would be revealed in that sutra. This one truth underlies the entire system of Buddhist philosophy. The Japanese name for the Lotus Sutra is **Myoho-renge-kyo**, and its Sanskrit title is **Saddharma-pundarika-sutra**. The content of the sutra was divided into two parts by the great Chinese Buddhist scholar T'ien-t'ai. Its first fourteen chapters are called the theoretical teaching (**shakumon**) and the latter fourteen, the essential teaching (**honmon**). The theoretical teaching emphasizes that everyone has the capacity to understand the ultimate reality of life, that is, to attain Buddhahood. These first chapters propound Buddhahood as a theoretical potential inherent in all people. In contrast, the essential teaching presents Buddhahood as a reality manifested in Shakyamuni's life. Through his own action and experiences, the Buddha demonstrated that all others can achieve the same state of Buddhahood he himself attained.

Now, let us give a brief outline of the twenty-eight chapter Lotus Sutra. As we have said, the Lotus Sutra elucidates the true nature of human existence; it is the crystallization of Shakyamuni's enlightenment. The introductory chapter (**Jo-hon**)
describes an impressively vast assembly gathered, to hear Shakyamuni expound the Lotus Sutra. The gathering was held on a mountain called Gridhrakuta, or Eagle Peak, on the outskirts of Rajagriha, the capital of the Magadha kingdom in central India. The Buddha was attended by twelve thousand noble monks who, according to the sutra, were all free from delusions, desires and karmic hindrances. Among these monks were such well-known disciples as Mahakashyapa, Shariputra, Maudgalyayana, Subhuti, Ananda and Shakyamuni’s son, Rahula. Mahaprajapati, who was Shakyamuni’s aunt, was also there with six thousand of her own followers, as was Yashodhara, who had been Shakyamuni’s wife while he was still a prince before renouncing the world. Eighty thousand great bodhisattvas almost equal to the Buddha in their understanding and preaching of the Law were also assembled. The sutra says that in their past existences, these bodhisattvas had served innumerable Buddhas and dedicated themselves, body and mind, to self-perfection and altruistic deeds.

All in all, more than 300,000 human and non-human beings assembled on Eagle Peak, a scene of unimaginable grandeur. Asked how this and the even more amazing events described in the sutra could have occurred, Josei Toda, second president of the Soka Gakkai, answered that the assembly in the first chapter was actually an allegorical description of Shakyamuni Buddha’s own enlightenment. This answer offers an important insight, for the hundreds of thousands of human and non-human beings present at the ceremony represent different aspects of Shakyamuni’s life, that is, the Ten Worlds inherent in his life as a Buddha. It is as if the Ten Worlds of his life had been projected on a screen called “Eagle Peak.” A thorough grasp of this concept will make clear the answers to many of our questions.

In the second chapter, entitled Hoben-pon or “Means,” Shakyamuni reveals to the assembly his fundamental intention, namely, to enable all human beings to attain Buddhahood. His earlier teachings had set forth three lesser goals—the awakening to be attained in the states of Learning, Realization and Bodhisattva. However, for the first time, he now replaces those three with the supreme goal of Buddha-hood, which he declares to be the only true purpose of Buddhist practice. The Lotus Sutra is intended to clarify the Law to which all Buddhas are enlightened, and which is the key to the attainment of Buddha-hood for all people. We find an allusion to the nature of this Law in the phrase, “The wisdom of all Buddhas is infinitely profound and immeasurable” (Sho-but-chi-e. Jinjin muryo), appearing at the beginning of this chapter. Before revealing that Buddhahood is the ultimate goal for all people, Shakyamuni defines the unchanging pattern of existence common to all phenomena in the universe as the ten factors of life. The Hoben chapter states: “The true entity of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, internal cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect, and their consistency from beginning to end.” These ten factors are common to all states of life from Hell to Buddhahood, and to both sentient and insentient beings. Common mortals were thought to be fundamentally distinct from a Buddha. In other words, common mortals were regarded as beings of the nine worlds, from Hell to Bodhisattva, which contrast with Buddhahood and indicate transient and deluded states of life. The supposedly insurmountable gap between the nine worlds of common mortals and Buddhahood is thus completely closed. Nothing separates Buddhahood from the nine worlds; it exists within the lives of ordinary people.

Shakyamuni goes on to explain that all Buddhas make their appearance because they wish to awaken in all people the Buddha wisdom, to show all people the Buddha wisdom, to cause all people to realize the Buddha wisdom, and to lead all people to the Buddha wisdom. He says, “I pledged to make all people perfectly equal to me, without any distinction between us.

In the chapters that follow, from the third (Hiyu-hon, Parable) to the ninth (Ninki-hon, Prophecies Conferred on Learners and Adept), the Buddha goes on to recount parables and allegories to awaken his disciples’ understanding, and he predicts that all will eventually attain Buddhahood. The foremost in wisdom among all the disciples, Shariputra, immediately realizes the Buddha’s true intent upon hearing of “the true entity of all phenomena” set forth in the Hoben chapter. Other disciples understand after they hear the parables or are told of their past relationship with Shakyamuni.

The following five chapters—the tenth through the fourteenth—are intended for those who will propagate the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha’s death, especially in the Latter Day of the Law. The tenth (Hosshi-hon, Teachers of the Law) and the eleventh (Hoto-hon, Emergence of the Treasure Tower) specifically refer to the importance of propagation, clarifying how people should practice and propagate the Lotus Sutra in the predicted evil age following the Buddha’s death. In the eleventh chapter a majestic treasure tower, about half the diameter of the earth in height and decorated with seven kinds of precious metals and stones, including gold and silver, appears from beneath the earth and rises into the air, where it hangs suspended. From inside the tower, Taho Buddha announces solemnly, “Shakyamuni, World-Honored One, all that you have expounded is the truth!” Then, Shakyamuni summons all the Buddhas throughout the entire universe. He opens
the door of the tower, seats himself beside Taho and, using his mystic power, lifts the assembly into the air. Then he addresses them, "Who among you will propagate the Lotus Sutra throughout the saha world? Now is the time to do so! Before long, I will enter nirvana. The Buddha hopes there is someone to whom he can entrust this Lotus Sutra."

The earlier chapters predict that Shakyamuni's disciples of Learning, such as Shariputra and Mahakashyapa, will awaken to their inherent Buddha nature. The Treasure Tower symbolizes the grandeur and dignity of this inherent Buddha nature. It also represents a shift from a theoretical perception to the actual manifestation of the Buddha nature. The jewels which adorn the tower signify the seven essentials of Buddhist practice-listening to the true teaching, believing it, meditating on it, practicing it assiduously, devoting oneself to it, and always reflecting on oneself and working toward self-improvement.

Just as the seven kinds of jewels decorate the Treasure Tower, those essentials of Buddhist practice work to adorn and support human life itself and enable its dignity to surface.

The assembly remains in the air until the end of the twenty-second chapter; this part of the sutra is known as "the Ceremony in the Air." At the end of the Hoto chapter, Shakyamuni enumerates six difficult and nine easy acts to show people how difficult it will be to embrace and propagate the Lotus Sutra after his death. In the chapters that follow, innumerable bodhisattvas respond to Shakyamuni's call and volunteer for the task. Those bodhisattvas vow to risk their lives in propagating the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law. In the thirteenth chapter (Kanji-hon, Admonition to Embrace (the Sutra)), they vow to face the three powerful enemies of Buddhism who will appear after Shakyamuni's death.

However, in the fifteenth chapter (Yujyuppon, Emerging from the Earth), Shakyamuni declines to transfer the Law to these bodhisattvas, saying that there are others better suited to the task. As he finishes speaking, a multitude of noble bodhisattvas appear from below the ground. They are called Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Astounded by this sight, Bodhisattva Miroku asks Shakyamuni on behalf of the assembly who they are, where they have come from, for what purpose they have appeared, what Buddha they followed and what teaching they practiced. Shakyamuni explains that they are his own disciples whom he has been teaching since the distant past. This is the first indication in the sutra that Shakyamuni actually attained enlightenment not in that lifetime in India but at a time in the remote past. "The Ceremony in the Air" comes to a climax with the revelation of the Buddha's original enlightenment in the next chapter.

In the sixteenth chapter (Juryo-hon, Life Span of the Tathagata), Shakyamuni explicitly states that he first attained enlightenment at a time in the remote past called gohyaku-jintengo not at the age of thirty in his present lifetime as was commonly supposed. He states: "The time is limitless and boundless ... since I in fact attained Buddhahood" (Ga jitsu jo-butsu irai. Muryo muhen. Hyaku sen man noku. Nayuta ko.). He declares that since his initial enlightenment, he has been born at different times into the world as various individuals and led multitudes of people to enlightenment. As for how he reached his original enlightenment in the remote past of gohyaku-jintengo he states, "Once I also practiced the bodhisattva austerities, and the life which I then acquired has yet to be exhausted" (Ga hon gyo bo-satsu do. Sho jo jumyo. Kon yu mi jin.). However, he does not refer to the Law which enabled him to achieve enlightenment.

A portion of the same chapter reads: "Ever since then I have been constantly in this world, expounding the Law and instructing [the people]" (Ji ju ze rai. Ga jo zai shi. Shaba sekai. Seppo kyoke.). Shakyamuni Buddha has in fact been eternally present in this real world; that is, "Buddhahood" or enlightenment is not something found in another world or in some ideal place such as the Pure Land of Perfect Bliss, the land of Amida Buddha in the west. Buddhahood is not something apart from the lives of common mortals.

By declaring that he himself has dwelt in this mundane world even after attaining supreme enlightenment, Shakyamuni shows through his own example that there is no fundamental difference between the Buddha and ordinary human beings.

The assembled bodhisattvas and others learn about the duration of the Buddha's enlightenment in the Juryo chapter and receive various benefits, which are explained in the next chapter, Funbetsu Kudoku-hon or "Distinction of Benefits." In the first half of this chapter, the Buddha reveals that they are assured of attaining Buddhahood. The latter half of the seventeenth and the final eleven chapters are exhortations to propagate the Lotus Sutra after Shakyamuni's passing. In the twenty-first chapter (Jinriki-hon, Mystic Powers of the Tathagata) the Buddha displays ten mystic powers and transfers the Law specifically to Bodhisattva Jogyo, leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. He says, "I have briefly described in this sutra all the laws of the Buddha, all the invincible mystic powers of the Buddha, all the secret storehouses of the Buddha and all the profound practices of the Buddha." In the twenty-second chapter (Zokurui-hon, Entrustment) he transfers the
Law in general to all the bodhisattvas, gods and people at the assembly. All the Buddhas who have gathered then return to their respective lands, leaving the Treasure Tower to revert to its original state. Meanwhile the assembly is transported back to Eagle Peak.

The twenty-third chapter (Yakuo-bon, Bodhisattva Yakuo) tells how Bodhisattva Yakuo, in an existence in the remote past, burned his elbows in homage to Nichigatsu Jomyotoku Buddha who taught him the Lotus Sutra. It also expounds the benefits received by embracing the Lotus Sutra, and urges the spread of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, stating, "In the fifth five hundred years after my death, accomplish worldwide kosen-rufu." The twenty-fourth chapter (Myoon-hon, Bodhisattva Myoon) and the twenty-fifth chapter (Fumon-hon, Universal Gate) describe how Bodhisattvas Myoon and Kannon propagate the Lotus Sutra and devote themselves to saving the unhappy by manifesting thirty-four and thirty-three forms, respectively.

The twenty-sixth chapter (Darani-hon, Dharani) says that Bodhisattvas Yakuo and Yuze, heavenly gods such as Bishamon and Jikoku, and the female demon Kishimojin and her ten daughters pledge to protect those who embrace the Lotus Sutra. The twenty-seventh chapter (Myoshogonno-bon, King Myoshogon) tells how the two princes, Jozo and Jogen, together with their mother, Lady Jotoku, persuaded their father, King Myoshogon, to accept Buddhism. Shakyamuni reveals that Jozo and Jogen are now Bodhisattvas Yakuo and Yakujo. In the last, twenty-eighth chapter (Fugen-bon, Bodhisattva Fugen), Bodhisattva Fugen, who came from the eastern sphere of the universe to this world, asks how one can contrive to encounter the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha's death. In answer to this, Shakyamuni explains the four requisites one must acquire:

to be under the protection of the Buddhas, to plant roots of virtue, to carry out correct meditation, and to aspire for the happiness of all people. Then, Bodhisattva Fugen swears to protect the Lotus Sutra and those who embrace it in the evil-ridden Latter Day of the Law.

The foregoing is a brief outline of the Lotus Sutra, but the important point is what Shakyamuni was ultimately trying to express. What is the essence of the Lotus Sutra? The doctrines contained in the Buddhist sutras are not always stated clearly enough for all to comprehend. It took a philosopher and master of Buddhism like the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai in China to identify and formulate the principles implicit in the Lotus Sutra. Spending long hours in contemplation, with his deep insight, T'ien-t'ai was able to perceive the perfect system of philosophy inherent in the sutra which he called ichinen sanzen (three thousand realms in a momentary existence of life). However, although T'ien-t'ai uncovered the philosophical essence of the sutra, his doctrine was far too difficult to be readily communicated to the vast majority of people. It was Nichiren Daishonin who gave concrete and practical expression to the truth taught by Shakyamuni and illuminated by T'ien-t'ai. With the Daishonin it was finally brought into sharp focus and made applicable in people's daily lives.

Nichiren Daishonin realized that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the ultimate Law of life, was implicit in the depths of the Juryo chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The path Shakyamuni followed when he attained Buddhahood in the distant past of gohyaku-jintengo was also that of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Nichiren Daishonin embodied that Law in the Gohonzon so that all people in the Latter Day, by embracing it, could attain Buddhahood and lead peaceful, fulfilling lives.

The twenty-eight chapters of Shakyamuni's Lotus Sutra, although expounding life in its entirety, go no further than merely stating the truth. That is, these chapters are elaborate explanations of the Law, while Nam-myoho-renge-kyo revealed by Nichiren Daishonin is actually the Law operating in one's life.

The title of each sutra is its essence, summarized in a few words. The title of the superb Chinese translation of the Lotus Sutra made by Kumarajiva in 406 is Miao-fa-lien-hua-ching, or Myoho-renge-kyo according to the Japanese pronunciation. Each of the five characters forming this title has profound philosophical meaning, and Myoho-renge-kyo itself denotes the Law of life or ultimate reality. Nichiren Daishonin prefaced this title with the word namu (generally pronounced nam when connected to Myoho-renge-kyo). Namu comes from Sanskrit and is transliterated into two Chinese characters; it means to devote one's life. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo thus means to devote oneself to Myoho-renge-kyo, becoming one with the ultimate truth or cosmic life force.

Namu of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo means more than mere devotion in the conventional sense. In his commentary on the Lotus Sutra called the "Ongi Kuden" (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings), Nichiren Daishonin explains that namu signifies a simultaneous two-way interaction: We devote ourselves to, or become one with, the universal, unchanging truth of Myoho-renge-kyo, and at the same time draw forth infinite wisdom and energy which function in response to our changing circumstances. Faith and practice constitute the actual means by which this interaction occurs.
Buddhism could not survive if it were merely a matter of doctrine or ideology. It would be like a blueprint for a house, theory without actuality. The Lotus Sutra explains the true entity of life clearly enough, but what it teaches becomes vivid and real only with the final stroke -- Nam-myoho-RENge-kyo.

Here is a specific example. The Lotus Sutra reveals that the universe and the individual self are one and the same; that is, that our life is itself the macrocosm. Although a theoretical understanding of this doctrine is not difficult, we cannot accept it as a reality until we can actually feel our own being fused with the great universe as its energy pulses within our life. This becomes possible only when we fuse with the Law - Nam-myoho-RENge-kyo -- by practicing to the Gohonzon.

What, then, is the meaning of each character of Myoho-RENge-kyo? Myo (mystic) signifies "incomprehensible," and ho means "Law." Thus myoho means the "Mystic Law" which is the incomprehensible realm of life, beyond our ability to imagine or conceive. From another viewpoint, myo, meaning "incomprehensible," indicates the true entity of life, and ho, all phenomena, which are its manifestations. In terms of the principle of ichinen sanzen, the three thousand changing aspects correspond to ho and the unchanging reality (ichinen) permeating these changing aspects is myo. All existences, at one time or another, assume physical shape, size and vital energy and, at other times, assume an incorporeal state (called ku in Buddhism). Phenomena (ho) are changeable, but pervading all phenomena there lies a constant reality. This reality is called myo.

RENge means lotus flower. In Buddhism the lotus is used to symbolize the simultaneous nature of causality, because the lotus produces both flowers and seeds at the same time. In Buddhism the nine worlds correspond to "cause," and Buddhahood, to "effect." Both simultaneously exist within us. Moreover, from the standpoint of faith and practice, when we chant Nam-myoho-RENge-kyo (cause), the state of Buddhahood simultaneously emerges (effect). This is represented by the lotus flower.

Our ordinary perception leads us to believe that first we perform an action, and later we may receive its effect. But the Buddhist teaching reveals that this future effect is already inherent within the act itself. The important implication here is that our future is being shaped by our present actions. Thus, everyone is responsible for his or her own destiny. At present we may be suffering the effects of bad karma we created in the past, but because the innermost depth of our life-the Buddha nature-remains independent of the karma accumulated by past deeds, we can create true happiness under any circumstances, if only we manifest the Buddha nature. This truth is represented by another quality of the lotus flower. The pure blossoms spring forth from a muddy swamp, yet they are undefiled by the mud. Similarly, the innermost core of our lives remains untainted despite whatever evil deeds we may have committed, and by chanting Nam-myoho-RENge-kyo, we can at once bring forth our potential Buddhahood, no matter what our circumstances may be. Thus, renge also signifies the emergence of Buddhahood.

Finally, kyo means sutra, or the teachings of a Buddha. The Chinese character for kyo originally meant a warp of cloth, and later came to have the additional meanings of thread of logic, reason, way or law. It was therefore also used in tile sense of a teaching to be preserved. Kyo of Myoho-RENge-kyo indicates that Myoho-RENge-kyo is itself tile eternal and unchanging truth.