

Yukio Matsudo

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**A short review by Yukio Matsudo on
"The evolving Buddha: New Perspectives
and Dynamic Change in Nichiren Buddhism
(SGI)" of J.D. Gilbert (February 2021)**

1. A universalist approach

To begin with, I passionately share Gilbert's intention: "*A Universalist approach rejects absolute dogma or the fundamentalist viewpoint of the primacy and unchallenged superiority of a particular religions. It is open to criticism and analysis but is willing to state the validity and efficacy of its particular practice*" (p. 10). I have been actually practicing this perspective and have offered proposals to get rid of the exclusivist dogmas of Nichiren Shoshu Head temple (NST) since the 1990's shortly after the excommunication.

The main critical subjects are "the Dai-gohonzon as the mandala for the *Honmon no kaidan*" and "the thesis about Nichiren as eternal original Buddha" that additionally gave a basis for "the absolute power of the high priest". I published three books in Japan to refute these false teachings and provide an innovative take on Nichiren Buddhism. They were:

- »In search of a Humanistic Doctrine of "Nichiren as Original Buddha" – for the Foundation of the Soka Renaissance Movement« (1992),
- »An Innovation of Nichiren Thought – About the Thesis on "Ordinary Person as True Buddha"« (1994), and
- »The Doctrine Controversy of the Heisei period – Laughing at the "Refutation" of Nichiren Shōshū« (1995).



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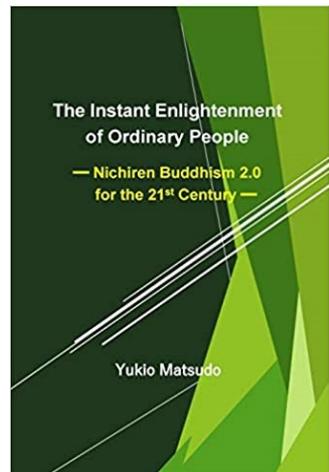


»The Doctrine Controversy of the Heisei period – Laughing at the "Refutation" of Nichiren Shōshū« (1995).

Shortly after my first book of 1992 NST started against my doctrinal challenges a campaign involving more than ten priests and scholars. Even the high priest Nikken referred to my publication in a big meeting of teachers and attempted to counter my “symbolic theory of the Gohonzon”. It might sound paradox, but I was thankful to those who made efforts to refute my thesis because I could then develop and sharpen my own standpoint. I could complete my point of view in the form of “the instant enlightenment of ordinary people” as the title of my recent publication is («The Instant Enlightenment of Ordinary People: Nichiren Buddhism 2.0 for the 21st Century» (2018)).

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1724519840/>

SG announced its doctrinal separation from NST in November 2014, more than 20 years later after my efforts. It became imperative for SG-HQ to get rid of these myths that are not only false but also serve as the



foundation for legitimating the authoritarian structure of the temple with the High priest.

In this respect I appreciate Gilbert's reference to my book NB2.0 mainly in chapter 2 "Nichiren – The Ordinary Buddha" and chapter 4 "The Gohonzon – Entering the Treasure Tower" of his book. Let me cite what Gilbert has taken up from my explanation:

The scholar Yukio Matsuo has examined this issue based on Nichiren's writings. He considers the view of Nichiren as a special primordial Buddha as nothing but 'founder worship' and a hagiographic deification of Nichiren himself. Nichiren fully manifested his Buddhahood but revealed in his own life nothing other than the "mystic principle that is originally inherent in all living beings," in other words, the universal essence of enlightenment, the world of Buddhahood. Conversely, Nichiren held up as the only eternal original Buddha creates a "dogmatic, exclusivistic and fundamentalist understanding of Nichiren" (SGI Newsletter 9404, p.36), and he ceases to be an ordinary person. Instead, Matsudo suggests Nichiren was a pioneer opening up the Buddha way to all ordinary people and that the eternity is only found in the present moment when we reveal our Buddhahood (Gilbert, p.53f.).

Gilbert, thanks for this reference. Since I don't know about the "SGI Newsletter 9404", would you mind providing me with this information?

J.D. Gilbert

Hi Yukio, thank you for your positive engagement and I appreciate the research you have done in this area. Newsletter 9404 is NL9404BB from a series The Basics of Buddhism in the New Era of Worldwide Kosen Rufu which refers to reference 9. The Ibid p36 refers to your work rather than this newsletter. I will edit to make clearer in the footnotes.

Yukio Matsudo

OK, I wondered so.

2. A fundamental misunderstanding of daimoku

My book NB2.0 presents at the same time a perspective on the future of SGI study and explored, for example, the differentiated understanding of five and seven characters of daimoku. I concluded my view as follows:

“To propagate the five characters of Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō” means to propagate the seven characters of Nam-myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō, which is the practice of chanting the Daimoku of Nam-myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō” (NB2.0: 164).

This understanding exactly corresponds to the Goshō passage that Gilbert himself cited in Chapter 1:

“Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, both the Lotus Sutra and the other sutras are of no use. Only Nam-myōhō-enge-kyō (has the power of benefit to lead to enlightenment) (s. WND 1, p902). The chanting of Nam-myōhō-enge-kyō therefore supersedes the Lotus Sutra entirely (p.32).

Though Gilbert must have surely taken notice of my interpretation based on Nichiren’s statement, he explains the difference in a very strange way. He firstly tries to “clarify that Nichiren often refers to Myōhō-enge-kyō, the title of the Lotus Sutra, as the key fundamental law and the phrase to be chanted” (p. 76). This is a wrong assumption because we do not chant Myōhō-enge-kyō alone.

Starting from this fundamentally false assumption Gilbert offers an odd “metaphor of a swimming pool” to explain why he regards the Nam(u) “a relational marker, a sign of respect towards the Mystic Law” (76):

„The Nam is the diving board into the swimming pool of the law of life, My-ōhō-enge-kyō. In that sense the use of Nam is acceptable as it does not form part of the essential phrase itself” (ibid.).

Sorry, this is just nonsense.

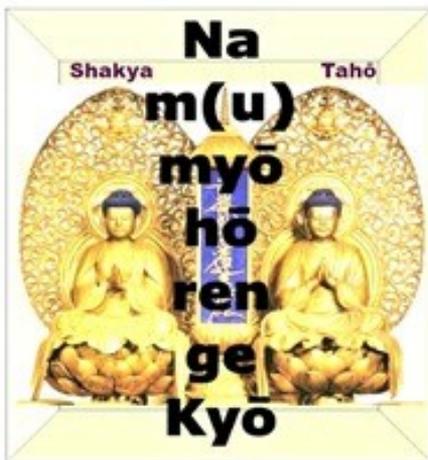
By separating the two element of Nam (devotion to) and the Mystic Law Gilbert falls back to the pre-Nichiren understanding of the daimoku. He contradicts even Ikeda's conviction that "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essential teaching because it is the great law to be propagated in the Latter Day" (32).

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo presents an inseparable unity beyond any analytical explanations and has its own significant meanings.

To stay with the metaphor, swimming itself must correspond to the practice of daimoku chanting, so that one becomes one with the water like "a fish in the water". This activates all the protective and transformative functions of the Dharma. This picture corresponds to the principle of "Ji no Ichinen Sanzen" Nichiren developed in contrast to its theoretical "Ri no Ichinen Sanzen" of T'ien-t'ai, just to watch the water at the pool or to sit in the water.

By the way, the oneness in and with the water in this metaphor is expressed by the principle of "Kyo-chimyogo," symbolized by the "Two Buddhas sitting in the Treasure Tower" in the Gohonzon. So far, it is not correct to say that "*The central inscription of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the treasure tower surrounded by the Buddhas.....*" (Gilbert, 124).

This corresponds to the understanding of Nichiren-shu, as the picture on the right side indicates (see NB4.0, p. 66). The two Buddhas are sitting in the Treasure Tower.



J.D. Gilbert

Thank you, Yukio. I agree regarding Nam myoho rengo kyo as the phrase to chant in its totality. The context of my point was that some people do not accept Nam and consider only

Namu to be chanted and that Nichiren sometimes talks about the 5 characters and sometimes the 7 characters. To avoid confusion, I will amend this section (which fortunately is very easy to do.) to make it clear that Nam myoho rengo kyo in its totality is the essential phrase.

Yukio Matsudo

I understood the context you mean. Especially Nichiren shu people prefer pronouncing Namu, but I also don't like it as you. It is easy to explain this phonetical phenomen for the favor of Nam-myoho.... It's similar to pronounce Hokkaido instead of Hoku-kaido.

As to 5 and 7 characters of daimoku please refer again to my explanation in NB2.0. Generally it is very important to take consideration that Nichiren thinks and writes in a multi-layer level and makes a clear interpretation complicated and difficult. If you take some phrases literally, you will come to a confusion because you will meet other statements that contradict them.

By the way, I like and appreciate your open-minded attitude to correct any misunderstanding. And sorry for my harsh tone in critical comment. But, at the end, it would be really nice if you can correct important errors or unfortunate formulations to make your book better and reliable, that you gave so many efforts.

Kathy Parkhouse

Why is this 'critique' occurring on Facebook? Can't you find more value creative ways to spend your time than ripping someone else's work apart Yukio....seems all very odd to me 😊

Yukio Matsudo

Kathy Parkhouse, is there any regulation that forbids a critical discussion on FB? You seem to be just not accustomed to any scholarly debate, right? I am constantly discussing about

NB with other Japanese scholars on FB to correct and deepen our under...

Linda Ribbach

Yukio Matsudo It seems that in all religions there are people who get involved in scholarly debate. There certainly is nothing wrong with that. Nichiren must have anticipated this scholarly debate and how it would lead to division and derision in the ... Nichiren must have anticipated this scholarly debate and how it would lead to division and derision in the ranks.

So he based this Buddhism on faith "alone can we enter the world of Buddha". I think that's what Kathy was saying.

Most people have neither the interest nor capacity to get into scholarly minutia.

Yukio Matsudo

Linda Ribbach, the understanding of "faith alone" is rather for Nenbutsu practitioners than for Nichiren Buddhists. I will explain the reason below.

Linda Ribbach

Yukio Matsudo Are you talking about the three proofs? I think most practitioners have the capacity to understand these; I'm talking about all of this debate that goes between the religious scholars, like you. ."

This is what the sutra means when it states that one can gain entrance through faith alone." Real Aspect of the Gohonzon.

Is this an apocryphal gosho?

Yukio Matsudo

Linda Ribbach, the statement that one can gain entrance through faith alone is a general claim. Then,

it follows:

"they can enter the treasure tower of the Gohonzon. ... What is most important is that, by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

alone, you can attain Buddhahood. It will no doubt depend on the strength of your 'faith' (or 'believing heart')." The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon, WNDI, p.832

The practice of chanting daimoku is itself exactly the practical expression of the faith. Additionally Nichiren makes that dependent on whether your faith is strong or not." Now, we need to consider what that means. Finding an answer to this specific question requires a deeper study of NB.

In this way we entered into a dialogue together.

Linda Ribbach

Yukio Matsudo Again, actual proof, theoretical proof and historical(documentary) proof. "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"

I agree completely - Yes, what does "deep faith" mean who is the judge of that? Nobody by oneself and the result in ones life.

I'm not questioning some people's ability or desire to delve deeply into the history or validity of Nichiren's teachings.

I just know that, that exercise is not for everyone and the point of Nichiren expounding the chanting of NMRK is because almost everyone can do chant even if they can't understand your theses or Jackie Stones' these etc.

I think the scholars just like the debate and at what point does it cause more confusion and division?

Yukio Matsudo

Linda Ribbach, I have a problem with your mental attitude to regard any buddhological research and debate as a cause for confusion and division?

Apart from this issue we demonstrated the beneficial effects of chanting daimoku on bodily energy (in NB3.0), on brainwaves (in NB3.1) & on immune maker (in NB 4.0). These research results will surely enhance and deepen your faith because they only support your practice.

Linda Ribbach

Yukio Matsudo yes I was greatly inspired by your book "Change your Brainwaves Change Your Karma". It's helped to rejuvenate my practice. Thank you.

Yukio Matsudo

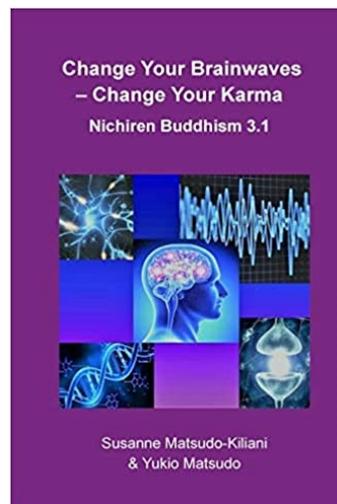
Linda Ribbach, I am very glad to hear that from you. Thanks for your interest in reading our books, Linda.

Yukio Matsudo

3. Ignoring scientific explanation to the effects of practicing daimoku

In our book »Change your Brainwaves, Change your Karma: Nichiren Buddhism 3.1« (2017, hereafter referred to as NB3.1) we made clear the view of Mr. Ikeda who – in his dialogue with a Japanese neuroscientist – made this concluding remark about the relationship between religion and science”: They “should not be treated as separate from each other, nor should they remain in a conflict relationship. Instead, they should complement and mutually benefit each other” (NB3.1, p.9). In this sense we have observed our brainwaves to see if there are some significant changes whilst chanting.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1974345238/>



1) Gilbert seems also to be interested in such scientific research when he often states that we are living “in a scientific age” (71) and therefore that a religious teaching should be reasonable. He even suggests that “our understanding of chanting, how it functions and the science behind it, is evolving” (79) and that “Ikeda’s dialogues ... have set SGI on an open-minded path to engage with science” (110).

2) Nevertheless, Gilbert mentions our measurement results presented in our NB3.1 by referring to “two authors jointly have put themselves under EEG analysis during the chanting of the daimoku” and “experienced an increase in delta and theta waves” as well as “in alpha and theta crossover” (s. 113). Then Gilbert makes a strange negative comment on our experiences with the change of brain waves “with no control groups and such limited numbers of participants involved, however, nothing conclusive can be proved from these results” (ibid.). Did we ever make a claim that these measurements would “prove” the validity of the practice? No, we have just wanted to know what is happening during the chanting and this was indeed a pioneer task in this regard. To make a scientific claim is completely another issue that requires a great number of probands with a control group and we will get a statistical probability of the results.

Measuring our own brainwaves presents primarily part of our personal experience while we are indeed interested in expanding these experiments later at a scholarly level. Apart from this academic research project, our measurement results are encouraging our readers to deepen their practice and we are incredibly happy about that.



3) Gilbert remains skeptical about any scientific investigations “to validate the practice” and confesses his conviction that “chanting and practicing SGI Buddhism are about far more than achieving altered states in the brain” (114). However, so far as I know, nobody ever made such a narrow-minded claim. He continues: “It is about achieving our determinations, about our relationships with others and about deep personal change which manifests in daily life” (114). A few sentences later, he stresses again: “there are many aspects of life” (ibid.).

By saying so, Gilbert violates among others a basic rule of scholarly analysis to not disparage the subject in question by saying that this subject does not cover the whole system or that there are other issues to be considered in completely different research fields.

J.D. Gilbert

I feel Yukio is being a bit over defensive here regarding his research. As is mentioned above I am by no means rejecting scientific investigations on the power of chanting. I share a number of investigations including from the University of Hong Kong (probably the largest University led examination of the brainwave effects of chanting) on wider research on the effect of Buddhist chanting in general. Regarding Yukio and Susanne's research I merely caveat that further research is needed to provide conclusive evidence. This is not the rejection that Yukio seems to imply. I am keen to see more scientific studies in this area not less. It is important that there are wider sociological benefits to chanting that are harder to examine on a chemical and physical basis and will be harder to pin down. Likewise we need to be rigorous in our sources of scientific evidence such as in attributing brainwaves to certain emotional states.

Maxwell Hope

I will have to agree with you here. Yukio - you do amazing work! But I see J.D.'s point and from his phrasing I took nothing

negative. That's just me personally; I understand being defensive about your work. But here at least I read nothing that targets you specifically.

Yukio Matsudo

It's not just about this issue while I analyze his statement in further context. I will post it later again.

Sue Howes

I am becoming really upset by this and will no longer follow the posts. 😞. Tbh, I haven't followed every single word but... 😞. I have just started reading Jonny's book. I absolutely loved Susanne and Yukio's book *Change Your Brainwaves*... It made a huge impact on my life and has really helped me change the narrative of my life and worked on healing my ancestral karma. I am not an academic and I don't have a science brain, but apart from the research covered in Susanne and Yukio's book, I have read about water changing its make up by people praying/ meditating etc. Apologies, I'm not expressing myself very well. I am enjoying what I have read so far of Jonny's book, I love the historic aspect in chapter 1. It will probably take me a year to read, full time nana child care, but I can see by the bibliography how much research Jonny has put in. Surely some of this dispute can be out down to personal opinion. Come on chaps, please, we all share our heartfelt prayers for world peace and the taking away of suffering. 💜🙏

J.D. Gilbert

Sue Howes, thank you. In some ways I'm flattered that Yukio is giving me so much attention but I think there is space for both our books without excess criticism.

Yukio Matsudo

Hi Sue, Sorry for that. You feel unease because you may be just not accustomed to an academic, scientific form of debate and discussion including critical commenting. I am sure that J.D. Gilbert shares with me the same stance that I am making

an effort to write my critical comment because I take his book serious. Otherwise, I don't have to do so and many books didn't interest me so much. We are exchanging our opinions from different perspectives for our intellectual growth and mutual understanding.

Of course, it is your free choice, but if you follow our critical discussion you may start to read in a differentiated manner, instead of accepting everything written uncritically. - This is a general statement, not just referring to Gilbert's book.

Sue Howes

Yukio, you may well be right, however, this FB page, I feel, may not be the right place for yours and Jonny's debate, imo 😊. Also, I'd just like to correct you, I don't just accept everything uncritically 😊

Yukio Matsudo

Sue, I have some FB friends who are Japanese scholars and constantly discuss about NB, exchanging their opinions critically. Some make announcement of new books, articles etc. In this way I could learn a lot. There are also so many nonsense postings that I can ignore. Or is there a cultural difference regarding such open discussion? Britains appreciate more nice and diplomatic way of communication? Japanese are normally very polite and nice, but not the scholars. Germans love direct criticism, dispute and conflict.

Sue Howes

Yukio Matsudo, maybe it is cultural, I honestly don't know. I just don't think it's helpful to me personally, but it is of course, my personal opinion. In retrospect, it is of course my choice to have read some of the posts and then comment. I had the choice not to become involved.

Sue Howes

Yukio Matsudo, maybe it is cultural, I honestly don't know. I just don't think it's helpful to me personally, but it is of course,

my personal opinion. In retrospect, it is of course my choice to have read some of the posts and then comment. I had the choice not to become involved.

4. Rejecting scientific explanation to the effects of practicing daimoku

We are consistently advocating to regard the chanting of daimoku towards a mandala as a form of “mantra meditation”, a very spiritual practice. In our NB3.1, we emphasized the importance of fusion with the mandala, and we observe that evokes “altered states in the brain”. Further, in this respect, we are also dealing with the deep psychology of 9 kinds of consciousness in relation to different levels of brainwaves as well as changing karmic tendencies and patterns. In this way, we have never suggested such a nonsense that Nichiren Buddhism would be only about achieving altered states in the brain.

1) Gilbert was professedly suffering under a kind of allergy to scientific research on meditative practice. His negative judgement is related, among others, to mindfulness meditation that he practiced personally and made negative experiences. Based on them he wants to draw a distinct line between this meditative practice and SGI practice:

“Explanations based on material brain changes or physical health benefits, which have been the basis of mindfulness’ evidential claims in recent years, are not the prime focus of SGI practice” (84).

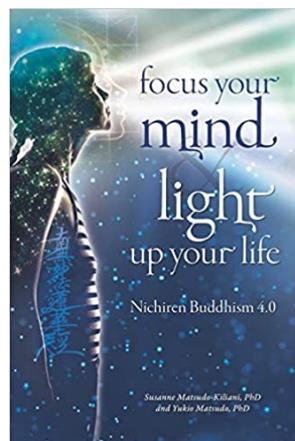
Really? Gilbert seems to have a very biased and even hostile understanding of mindfulness. As I explained above, any explanations about brainwaves changes should present just a certain visible illustration of what is going on in the brain, in addition to our emotional, mental and physical perception. If you are in a busy monkey mind, this brain state will be shown by a lot of high-beta brainwaves. When you calm down your mind by a meditative practice and feel relaxed and peaceful, alpha and theta

brainwaves will increase. The theta waves are important for any kinds of healing. We have demonstrated, though just through our personal experience, that chanting daimoku increases this brain-wave and contributes to a lot of improvements for mental and physical health. Mr. Toda without knowing this, nevertheless he encouraged hundreds thousands of people to overcome their diseases. “Physical health benefits” always played an important role as a focus of SGI Buddhism.

Referring to the “Handbook of Religion and Health” (2012), that reviewed thousands of data-based studies since the year 2000, he himself mentions its “conclusion that religious and spiritual practices conferred a wide range of physical and mental health benefits” (179). Therefore, I wonder why Gilbert denies this aspect.

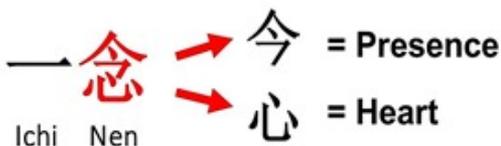
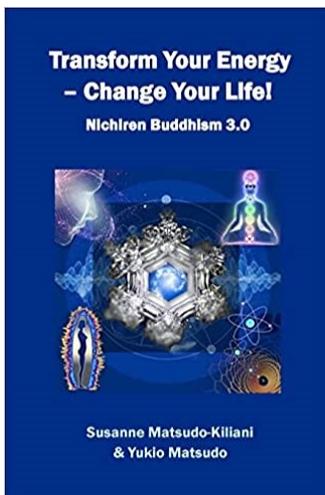
2) He describes his experience of suffering under insomnia and the failed experience that “mindfulness had not given me the health benefits I sought and I decided to fully reconnect with my Buddhist practice with the SGI, where I truly had received benefit and an approach that engaged me with society” (108). However, as he admits, “this is merely my personal experience” (ibid.). There are certainly a lot of personal conditions and circumstances contributing to a success or a failure of getting the health benefits from a Buddhist practice.

In our latest book »Focus your mind, Light up your life – Nichiren Buddhism 4.0« (2020, hereafter referred to as NB4.0) we are dealing with Nichiren’s conviction that “No prayer will go unanswered!” and his warning that “everything depends on your faith.”
<https://www.amazon.de/Focus-your-mind-Nichiren-Buddhism/dp/B08HTD9Z5V/>



This principle can surely be applied as well to the practice of mindfulness. Gilbert is not entitled to condemn other form of Buddhist practice.

3) By the way, I consider the practice of chanting daimoku as a mantra meditation that can be characterized as the “perfect and immediate contemplation for the Latter Day” (mappō no endonshikan, p. 317 in NB2.0). It is based on T’ien-t’ai’s method of Shi-Kan (samatha-vipasyana), concentration and contemplation of the mind. This meditative system is theoretically grounded in the form of Ichinen Sanzen while Ichi-Nen (One-Mind) can mean simply “complete presence of heart” (NB3.0, p.53; see the attached picture), that is nothing but the state of mindfulness (sati).



<https://www.amazon.de/Transform-your-energy-Nichiren-Buddhism/dp/1533440212/>

Thus, rejecting the important element of “mindfulness”, Gilbert denies the meditative aspect of chanting daimoku and, thus, destroys much of its significance.

J.D. Gilbert

I have to take issue with the accusations here and make clear that I do not condemn mindfulness meditation nor do I condemn scientific investigation. A fuller reading of Chapter 3 of my book will get a clearer picture. I do state that I do not

deny that mindfulness meditation is highly beneficial for many people even if it didn't work for me. What I do stress is that we need to be rigorous and critical in considering scientific research. Does it have a control group? The gold standard of scientific studies. As outlined in Farias and Wikholm's 'The Buddha Pill' much mindfulness meditation research does not but can be passed off as absolute findings. I greatly appreciate Yukio and Susanne's research but I think my caveat is fair that more research is needed. My only absolute criticism of a form of meditation in the chapter is that which focuses on the total dissolution of the ego as this poses a potential health risk to the individual as cited in the example I give from 'The Buddha Pill' .

Yukio Matsudo

J.D. Gilbert, thanks for your response. Just one thing: I don't know if "the total dissolution of the ego" is intended in MBSR. A portion of this ego dissolution will happen in our practice when you come near to kyochimyogo with gohonzon or in a flow state. And I regard this factor as important for realizing one's vision, mental and physical healing etc.

- **Maxwell Hope**

I personally experience a dissolution of ego when I achieve unity with the gohonzon. It's not a bad thing imo. It also isn't a persistent thing I experience all the time. But I agree overall with Yukio's point here.

- **J.D. Gilbert**

Yukio Matsudo

I'm referring specifically to meditation that aspires to an enlightenment based on total dissolution of the ego. Putting the ego in perspective or diminished as Maxwell Hope seems to referring to is no bad think in my opinion too. Likewise MBSR doesn't focus on this at all and as I point out I found some

benefits from mindfulness and acknowledge others have had even more.

Peter Tschorny

Concerning **Yukio** Matsudo's criticism on J. J.D.Gilbert's work:

another viewpoint on Nam myoho rengo kyo and chanting:

"Chant the Lotos Sutra with your ordinary distracted mind. You do not have to enter into a state of mental concentration. ...

just fix your whole mind on the words of the Lotos Sutra." (Miao-lo, The Annotations on "Great Concentration and Insight")

Nichiren comments:

"The term "whole mind" does not mean the mind that is concentrated in meditation ... It is the mind that is found within the ordinary distracted mind of daily life. ... when one who has faith ... Though one's mind is not fixed in concentration on the Buddha, though one's mouth does not recite the sutras ... without employing one's mind one will illumine the entire realm of phenomena, without uttering a sound ... Is this not an easy practice ...?" (Gosho 181)

Yukio Matsudo

Hi Peter, thanks for your contribution. In this passage you quoted Nichiren is arguing the easiness of the LS practice to refute the claim of Genshin (942-1017), the founder of the Japanese Jodo school, who proclaimed that Nenbutsu is easier than practicing LS. Then, much later, Honen succeeded this position for establishing his teaching of reciting Nenbtusu alone. Against this historical background I guess this might have made a decisive impact on the daimoku Nichiren invented (or reviewed) as an easy practice for everyone. Thus, the context of this disourse is completely different from my explanation about the chanting daimoku as a mantra meditaion.

Maxwell Hope

For me, I think chanting is a meditative practice - doesn't seem exclusive. At the very least, I get more benefit from chanting when I am mindful of what I am doing rather than just "going through the motions". However, "going through the motions" can be a good start for people who are entirely new or are struggling in general - maybe we learn to be more mindful over time in our practice.

5. Preferring religion to philosophy, science, and meditative practice

1) Gilbert defines SGI Buddhism as “a religion” in the sense of “a system of organization, faith and community” (170) that equally presents “the physical, social and emotional benefits of being part of a group” (166, s. also 178). Against this background he does not like any philosophical form of atheism, any form of “paying for a service” like yoga and mindfulness. Likewise, he values religion more than science by stressing “the difference in perspective that religion affords” (121). He is talking about the specific feature of “consciousness” that science seemingly cannot deal with because it is outside of brain. On the other hand, he refers to several scientists who study and postulate a “universal consciousness” (89). Gilbert himself come to “a greater understanding of chanting’s connection to and impact on this universal consciousness filed” (90). This is however exactly what we have been dealing with in our publications.

2) Gilbert takes a fundamentalist position in favour of an organized form of religion when he writes:

“Chanting the phrase Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is the absolute, which goes beyond any human myths or order to tap a natural, universal law. But this chanting and its associated teachings find fullest expression within the structures of an organization” (249). However, the credibility of this statement depends on the form of organized structure. In contrast to the expectation of Gilbert, the

same criticism can be exercised against SGI when it behaves exactly as Bryan Wilson warned to the anti-cult movement:

“Their general attributes are single-minded fanaticism, the supreme conviction of their own righteousness, a determination to ‘save’ individuals from their delusions, and indeed, thereby ‘save the world’” (175).

I was active in the same scholarly association of sociology of religion with Wilson and observed the organisation, much more with deep insights than him, because I had insider information and contact with critical ex- and still-members who suffered under this sectarian, cult-like behaviours of other members and leaders. I have been wishing that SGI could overcome this tendency and become an organisation that “does not show the ‘secrecy, authoritarianism, inflexibility, and entrenched resistance to change’” (177). This can be however never realized so long as it is glorified and accepted uncritically while it needs a series of proactive and constructive contributions to overcome its exclusivist tendency.

3) Gilbert promotes the idea of “Practicing with a community of believers” in contrast to a modern trend towards “spiritual individualism” (209). I do not regard both forms as contradicting but complementary. Or for me the latter is the basis of any organized form of faith community while this should serve for the individuals and not the other way around.

J.D. Gilbert

There are a great deal of misunderstandings of my work in this post and I hope people will form their own opinions. I never state that I value religion more than science, this is false. Advocating being part of an organization (which doesn't necessarily need to be SGI) is not an act of fundamentalism nor is it rejecting all forms of individualism or individual practice. Finally Yukio is unhappy that I offer a different perspective to him on the SGI movement which is positive. I have seen the

organization work at all levels in Europe and in Japan , nothing is perfect but my overwhelming experience is of a warm, free thinking, inclusive, open minded and supportive organization. I also mention in my book about the reality of authoritarianism in any organization and SGI guidance which challenges this tendency plus my own experience of challenging an experience of authoritarianism within the organization.

Yukio Matsudo

J.D. Gilbert, as mentioned many times, I wish SGI will become a wonderful community free of exclusivist dogmas, demonization of others etc. Thus, we work together in this direction despite of different perspectives and approaches. This is the main reason why I am taking your book serious

6. Unfair method to use scholarly works in his own favour

Gilbert is eager to discredit the mental and physical benefits of mindfulness meditation or MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction).

1) For this purpose, he refers to a book which should confirm “that barely any research had involved an active control group to ensure scientific rigour” (106). There are, however, another study research including control group, that confirm the positive effects of mindfulness meditation. Just as Gilbert does, I can mention one example: “Randomized Controlled Trial of Mindfulness Meditation for Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Effects on Anxiety and Stress Reactivity” by Elizabeth A. Hoge and 8 researchers, mainly from the Department of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA., published in August 2013. This paper starts with the following message:

“Mindfulness meditation has met increasing interest as a therapeutic strategy for anxiety disorders, but prior studies have been limited by methodological concerns, including a lack of an active comparison group. This is the first randomized,

controlled trial comparing the manualized Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program with an active control for Generalized Anxiety Disorder, a disorder characterized by chronic worry and physiological hyperarousal symptoms” (p.1).

This research was partly already reported in an annual meeting held in 2012, three years before the book that Gilbert quoted was published in 2015. Since I did not read this book “The Buddha Pill” of Farias and Wikholm, I can only ask Gilbert whether this report was considered in the book or not.

Gilbert makes use of this book because “they (the authors) describe the limitations to some of the research on mindfulness and also some of the adverse effects of meditation practice centred on dissolving ego” (104).

2) In this connection Gilbert does not forget to refer to „Zen at War” (1997) of Brian Victoria and wants to make clear contrast with the actions of Makiguchi and Toda:

“Violence and killings were even regarded as synonymous with Zen Buddhist compassion. These examples starkly contrast with the actions of the first two presidents of the Soka Gakkai, Makiguchi and Toda who stood up against the militarist authorities in World War Two” (105f.).

However, it was not only Zen Buddhist leaders but also almost all Buddhist priests who were involved in supporting the Japanese militarist authorities and invasion wars in Asia. Some right-wing Nichirenist movements were even proactive while they were backed up by their politico-religious ideologies of emperor and Japan as a divine country (s. 214-5)

3) Brian Victoria published an article in the Journal of Global Buddhism, “Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet” (2001) and condemned, among others, Makiguchi as an active supporter of the Japanese imperialist wars. Against this biased view Koichi Miyata, the specialist of research on Makiguchi,

quickly responded with critical comment and concluded precisely as follows:

“It was against this political and social backdrop that Makiguchi came to criticize the religious policy of the military regime. His arrest under the Peace Preservation Law shows that the regime judged his actions a hindrance to their conduct of the war. Thus, Makiguchi directly opposed the militarist ideology of imperial fascism for its religious policies, and because this opposition constituted an impediment to conduct of the war by the military regime, there is no doubt that he was persecuted for implicitly anti-war activities” (Miyata 2002, p. 84)

Likewise, Daniel Metraux, one of scholars specializing in research on Soka Gakkai, published an essay “A Critical Analysis of Brian Victoria’s Perspective on Modern Japanese Buddhist History” and remarked as follows:

“Thus, Makiguchi and Toda defied the government and went to prison not necessarily for anti-war beliefs, which the Soka Gakkai preaches today, but because it was against their deeply felt religious principles to adopt Shinto practices or to merge with another religious sect, even if it had Nichiren connections” (Metraux 2015, p.12).

It is not true that both founders “stood up against the militarist authorities” in the wartime as, for example, the Japanese Communist Party had consistently carried out an anti-war campaign and was severely suppressed. Both SG founders were arrested under the revised Peace Preservation Law of 1939 that should punish religious groups found to be committing blasphemy against the Ise shrine and thus reject the authority of the emperor.

It would be more correct to say: Makiguchi denied accepting the Shinto talisman and protested the religious policies based on imperial fascist ideology of military government.

4) I had to expand this issue to demonstrate that Gilbert often uses scholarly works only to assert his own view, but in an unfair

and biased manner. In this way Gilbert violates another basic rule of scholarly analysis to be objective and fair.

By this I mean Gilbert should have continued his critical scholarly observation that he began in Chapter 1 consequently until the end.

7. A strange legitimation for the coalition

As already mentioned above, in November 2014, SG declared to renounce the faith in Dai-Gohonzon as the ultimate object of worship preserved in the Head temple of Nichiren Shoshu (NST). Gilbert wondered “what took SGI so long to free itself from the association with this object?” (140). Then, Gilbert gives the answer that “As a lay movement of Nichiren Shoshu, SGI was obliged to go along with its doctrine” (ibid.) as if SG pursued unwillingly this path. For supporting this view, he quotes:

“J.M. Walsh interprets the SGI’s former acceptance of the object’s claimed superior status as nothing more than a necessary collaborative spirit whilst both organizations were affiliated” (ibid).

To be honest, this is for me the worst apologetic excuse for the collaboration, that I ever read. It was Toda who gave a minor Nichiren Shoshu school an extraordinary growth and wealth while the NST doctrines with the Dai-Gohonzon served as Exclusionist dogma. This dogma gave SG an enormous explosive thrust for its development, but at the same time a great number of conflicts and sufferings in family and society.

It was then Mr. Ikeda who propagated this NS Buddhism in the world since 1960’s. In the capacity of general head of all lay believers of NST he initiated the construction of Shohondo and could collect funds from members more than \$ 300 Mio. within 4 days of October 1965, supposed to be the *Honmon no kaidan*. Komeito party was also established firstly within this doctrinal framework. Mr. Ikeda donated 356 new temples (with a budget

of \$ 1 Mio. per temple) until 1990. Thus, there was no *raison d'être* for SG/SGI without NST and through their collaboration SG supported NST in an extraordinary intensity.

Gilbert tends to play down the organizational aspects of SGI and glorifies them too much. If his book is an internal publication, he can do it because it would be his job. However, any independent research work should fulfil some basic requirements like objective observation and description, fair reference to available literature, considering not only the surface but also the deep structure, looking at many aspects, etc. (These conditions would be the same for any sincere and courageous journalists in search of truth). The basic orientation would be: don't close your eyes and gaze at the historical reality. Otherwise, people will be deceived and misled by internal indoctrination based on manipulated historiography.

8. Every Buddhist organization needs financial incomes

In reading his book I was often astonished how Gilbert could be so naïve and unaware of many hidden realities behind the surface of idealistic proclamations. There is at least one misunderstanding I must address because most of members are left in false belief. It is about the money issue.

1) Gilbert praised SGI triumphantly that it is accessible for everyone due to "*the lack of expense in practicing its teachings*" (187).

"Unlike many contemporary self-development courses or even other forms of Buddhism centred on residential retreats, the core of SGI practice is free. For example, in SGI-UK there is no cost to receiving the Gohonzon, no charge to attend local meetings and any contributions to the upkeep of centres in what is known as the 'kosen rufu fund' are entirely voluntary (187).

“This SGI model of participation, free of cost” is a very common misconception that is often used for discrediting all other forms of charging for services as “doing business with Buddhism”.

2) This misunderstanding is based on a distorted perception of “membership”.

Many, including Gilbert, do not seem to be clearly aware of the fact that there are two different types of membership. One is the membership of a “registered non-profit / charity association”, the other refers to that of the “religious community”, in which one can only be active on a volunteer basis and make donations to the association.

It is customary in all forms of association to have members who pay a membership fee and have the right and duty to maintain the association, such as electing the board of directors and adopting the annual balance sheet. This association also maintains employees who receive monthly salaries for their jobs, which is normal business practice.

SG is now likely to have assets of \$ 100 billion, roughly the size of internationally renowned companies such as Sony, Hitachi, and Honda. These funds are deposited with large banks and invested for various companies. In addition, a few billion euros flow into the organization's coffers every year, through member donations, the sale of its own daily newspapers and books in millions of editions, or through the sale and management of cemeteries. One may need about \$ 10.000 Eur to obtain a tomb, this is still a reasonable price in Japanese comparison to temples. Many employees in the headquarters receive a good annual salary and receive additional support in the form of contributions to expenses for their activities.

I know a large Buddhist association in which not a single member receives a salary including the general director of the association. All activities are consistently carried out on a volunteer basis. From this perspective, all SGI associations appear like an

ordinary business company with many employees and lots of business activities.

3) In contrast to this, the other so-called "members of the religious community" are not members of this officially registered association and therefore do not participate in the association's business. They have no right to select the directors, to decide how the money should be spent or to check the balance sheet. They can only donate to the association and have also no right to check how the donations are to be spent.

Most of the "members" of the faith organization are only allowed to volunteer for various SG / SGI activities free of charge. This difference, whether you get a monthly salary for your services or serve on a voluntary basis free of charge and contribute everything at your own expense, becomes more glaring.

It is therefore misleading to claim that volunteering is more noble than the services that are provided in an association or in some form of society for a fee. These are simply different forms of activities and their rewards.

4) I have personally no objection to the present business form of SG/SGI and regard them as reasonable because of the great number of members. I am just against any manipulated misconception that is used to discredit and demonize others.

Maxwell Hope

Right, we don't need to make it "us" vs "them". There are pros and cons to each approach. I do wish we had more of a say in SGI-USA in terms of how the money is used. at least a survey of the member's interests could be helpful.

9. "This is your anger, not his!"

1) Any time we feel treated unfairly it is natural for us to get angry. In this case your talk with the authoritarian person did not resolve your conflict and a senior leader gave you the guidance mentioned above ("This is your anger, not his!"). This is a good

advice on a personal level so that you will be challenged to do your human revolution, but it is also a typical strategy to protect all leaders and the organization. It never challenges the authoritarian leaders or the culture and structure of the organization. The same logic relates to any official decisions and it is also completely correct for Gilbert to wish “to inspire debate, allow access to the academic research and contribute to the ongoing development of SGI” (257). But unfortunately, it never happened, and I fear it will remain so. All the country leaders are only interested in the directives from Tokyo since they are paid for their jobs.

2) I also wished that the 1991 split would enable SGI “to become a less rigid organization, to reject authoritarian leadership and to become more democratic, participatory and open so there was no discrimination between members and non-members” (229). This remains very superficially observed. Critical members and Non-members have been systematically demonized and slandered. “The independence and autonomy of the constituent organizations in each country,” as the SGI charter formalized in 1995, hadn’t been guaranteed, especially after Mr. Ikeda is not active anymore. Even the 2014 renounce of the faith in Dai-Gohonzon did not seem to improve the situation.

A short review by Yukio Matsudo on "The evolving Buddha" (2021)

10. Hi, Johnny, I now stop my comment on your book. I don't want to make members uncertain by going into the chapter 5 & 6 that shocked and terrified me.

I only wish that SGI will become a fantastic org. for serving to members and not the other way around.

for this everyone is challenged to stop being a blind sheep and to awaken to a brave lion.

---- End ----

Yukio Matsudo is feeling sad. 😞

April 29, 2021

Some people seem to underestimate the importance of study, self-reflection and dialogue at the doctrinal level.

Nichiren was a great master of study and debate and challenged the doctrines of all existing schools and scholars in his time. He emphasized the importance of Buddhist study, as formulated in the three basics like "Faith, Practice, and Study.":

"Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. "The True Aspect of All Phenomena," WND I, p. 386.

For Nichiren the Right Dharma, the correct teaching of Buddhism, was decisively important, as he expressed in the following declaration:

"Here I will make a great vow. ... —whatever obstacles I might encounter, so long as persons of wisdom do not prove my teachings to be false, I will never yield! All other troubles are no more to me than dust before the wind. "The Opening of the Eyes," WND I, p.280.

This is the great vow of a lion who stood alone and fought against all blind beliefs. For this purpose Nichiren provided us with the three kinds of evidence like documentary, theoretical and actual proof.

All the a.m. disciplines are based on Nichiren's great compassion and sense of responsibility to lead us to the correct way. He wishes we become brave lions and not blind, naive and obedient sheeps!!!

By the way, I am still longing for the time in that Mr. Ikeda was very active and promoted wide, deep and open-minded attitude towards intellectual workings. I could really enjoy great freedom

of research and discussion in IOP of the 90's while he was also very active in dialogue with scholars of various academic fields. I could even propose him personally to get rid of Nichiren Shoshu doctrines and this was officially realized in Nov. 2014, more than 20 years later (see my Nichiren Buddhism 2.0). He never told me that I should keep my mouth shut not to disturb the "(pseudo-)harmony." And again by the way, Itai-Doshin assumes that everyone is unique and has his/her own idea. This principle must not be misused to suppress free expression of one's opinion and open discussion. The basis is the spiritual unity but not the uniformity of individual personalities:

"All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the spirit of 'many in body but one in mind,' transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation." "The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life," WND I, p. 216.

Emily Bartlett

One of the reasons you stood out to me and I was interested in your books was because you value that spirit of dialogue and truly hearty and healthy debate, and that you do so with respect, curiosity and firm resolve. It's one thing to debate doctrine, it's another to have ego battles and have to work around the fragility of human emotion, and you navigate that beautifully. I'm sorry for whatever happened that made you feel told to just "keep your mouth shut." Don't do that! Haha 😊

I remember you commented on one of my posts in one of the SGI groups (I've left them since, couldn't find enough of the educational and engaging dialogue like you're saying I suppose), anyway I was asking about the Lotus Sutra and specifically struggling with the Dragon King's Daughter and

understanding why the daughter had to transform into a man to prove her enlightenment to the assembly. You commented on that post and it was so refreshing to see that engagement from someone! It indicates a passion and fiery energy that is easy to spot from miles away even online.

In a world where opinions are easily shared in the sea of the internet and the right to having an opinion is more valued than respecting and debating around fact (and being flexible in adjusting based on flaws in one's stance)... I think you being one to carry the torch of informed/studied dialogue is so vital! ❤️ Keep disturbing the harmony. 😊

Yukio Matsudo

Dear Emily, you can't imagine how much you make me happy with your warm and understanding words. NB is indeed my youthful passion and lifelong mission. For the sake of NB I couldn't and can't keep my mouth shut. Most of the traditionally handed down doctrines were old-fashioned and out of date for me because I have the ambition to redesign the NB appropriately for our contemporary century. So for decades I was all the time alone with my innovative interpretations, was criticized and slandered from all sides. Yet all that I had to experience is nothing significant compared to Nichiren's situations. And finally, today I have many allies who value the work of me and Susanne. This really delights us and also gives us strength and hope to continue our efforts. Thank you very much for your warm support!

Maxwell Hope

Yeah, it's so frustrating when I am told not to disturb the unity or harmony... I am just trying to engage the texts which actually deepens my faith! But people sometimes view it as a personal attack or an attack on the org.

Another frustrating thing I am told is "not to lose sight of the real purpose of this practice by getting absorbed in my intellectualism"... I'm like "but my intellectualism is a part of ME and

I am a Buddha, so I want to engage with this practice in a way true to MYSELF."

Emily Bartlett

Maxwell Hope I do think that when people feel challenged intellectually it's an easy deflection to say you're being absorbed in intellectualism. Which is not an easy thing to confront. Engaging the mind and expanding on its knowledge, understanding, perception, etc is an important part of our living experience. While it's true that the intellectual aspect of Buddhist theory, say, can become too heavy a focus and the "spirit" of it can be dimmed/forgotten (I sometimes struggle with this being a very cerebral person), intellectual conversation about doctrine should not be easily dismissed as "forgetting the spirit of the practice." Theory and practice must be in balance for it all to be valuable.

Maxwell Hope

Yeah I definitely agree! I don't wanna get too "bogged down" by the theory or doctrine such that it ruins my enjoyment of the practice. But generally seeking to understand deepens my faith which is the "door" to Buddha wisdom ;D

Yukio Matsudo

Maxwell Hope , don't worry! We are developing our wisdom and intellectual faculty as Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Steve Bell

Maxwell Hope, yeah, I get that a lot too.

Maxwell Hope

This whole thread has given me so much hope. Thank you all.

Yukio Matsudo is with Steve Bell and Matteo Ghinassi

A short summary regarding the significant difference between Tendai and Nichiren related to the doctrine of Ichinen Sanzen (the three thousand realms in a single moment of life)

I got a question about this, so I tried to sort it out. To avoid a complication, I will limit the citations from the Goshō just to one passage for each of the aspects I summarized.

1. Nichiren's "Actual Ichinen Sanzen based on the essential section" against Tendai's "Theoretical Ichinen Sanzen based on the theoretical section"

"There are two ways of contemplating Ichinen Sanzen. One is theoretical, and the other, actual. What T'ien-t'ai and Dengyō practiced at those days was theoretical, but what I practice now is actual. (...) The doctrine of T'ien-t'ai and Dengyō was the Ichinen Sanzen based on the theoretical section of the Lotus Sutra, while mine is that of the essential teaching. These two are as different as heaven is from earth." (The Treatment of Illness, WND I, p. 1114).

2. In case of Tendai's doctrine, the ten factors taught in the (Chapter 2 of the) theoretical section is placed to the foundation for integrating all the ten worlds into the 3,000 factors. One is then encouraged to observe these 3,000 possibilities in one's heart or in a single moment of life. This meditation method is called "threefold contemplation in a single mind." From Nichiren's point of view, however, this contemplative method serves as a cause to attain the enlightenment of the Mystic Law as a result. Thus, conversely, Tendai's complete method is ingested in the practice of observing the Mystic Law presenting the Simultaneity of Cause and Effect.

"The threefold contemplation in a single mind is in the end simply a method of practice designed to enable one to realize this Mystic Law. The threefold contemplation represents the

cause, and the Mystic Law represents the effect. But the effect is already present in the cause, and the cause is present in the effect. One is thus contemplating the Mystic Law in which both cause and effect are present simultaneously, and that is why this method can achieve the results that it does.” (Establishing the Correct Method of Contemplation, WND II, p. 517 f.)

3. Nichiren's "Actual Ichinen Sanzen based on the essential section" does not refer to the Tendai style of 10 x 10 worlds but is based on the doctrine of mutual containment of ten worlds in terms of "Nine Worlds -qua (soku)- Buddhahood." In this specific world view the Buddha nature serves as its foundation.

“The doctrine of Ichinen Sanzen is found in only one place, hidden in the depths of the sentence in the “Life Span” chapter of the essential section of the Lotus Sutra. ... T’ien-t’ai Chih-che alone embraced it and kept it ever in mind. The doctrine of ichinen Sanzen begins with the concept of “the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.” (The Opening of the Eyes, WND I, p. 220)

Moreover, Nichiren’s doctrine of Ichinen Sanzen refers – on the surface of the sentence – to the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past. In the depths of the sentence however, Nichiren regards this old Buddha as “the primordial, eternal Buddha without beginning” who is embodying the doctrine of Ichinen Sanzen based on “the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.” In this specific world view of Nichiren the Buddhahood or Buddha nature forms its foundation.

When we come to the essential section of the Lotus Sutra, then the belief that Shakyamuni first obtained Buddhahood during his present lifetime is demolished, (...) Thus the cause and effect of the Ten Worlds as expounded in the earlier sutras and the theoretical section of the Lotus Sutra are wiped out, and the cause and effect of the Ten Worlds in the essential section are revealed. This is the doctrine of original cause and

original effect. It reveals that the nine worlds are all present in beginningless Buddhahood and that Buddhahood is inherent in the beginningless nine worlds. This is the true mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, (...) the true Ichinen Sanzen. (The Opening of the Eyes, WND I, p. 233)

4. Nichiren's doctrine of Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds suggests opening up the Buddha world in the Nine Worlds

“The sutras preached in the forty and more years before the Lotus Sutra contain no mention of the Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds.” And if this principle is not enunciated, then we have no way of understanding the Buddhahood inherent in our own minds. (...)

But when we come to the Lotus Sutra, we find that the Buddha World that exists within the Nine Worlds is now revealed, and hence the bodhisattvas, persons of the two vehicles, and ordinary people in the six paths of existence can for the first time after the forty and more years see the Buddhahood that is within themselves. (On the Protection of the Nation, WND II, p. 138)

Thus, Nichiren's doctrine of the Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds have the practical meaning of Actual Ichinen Sanzen to open our own Buddha World in the Nine Worlds, i.e., to activate Buddha nature in our lives.

5. Nichiren's practice of the Mystic Law is equivalent to the Nominal state (myojisoku) in the Tendai category of “Six stages of practice” (Rokusoku).

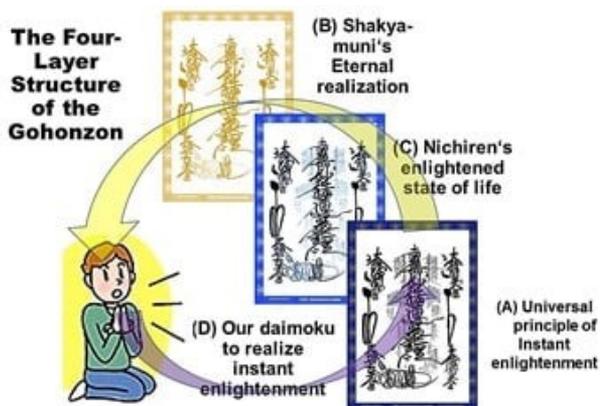
“In the Latter Day of the Law, is it necessary for beginners in the practice of the Lotus Sutra (...) the Buddha restricts those practices of precepts and meditation and places all emphasis upon the single factor of wisdom. And because our wisdom is insufficient, he teaches us to substitute faith for wisdom, making this single word “faith” the foundation. (...) Faith

is the cause for wisdom and corresponds to the stage of hearing the name and words of the (Mystic Law)” (On the Four Stages of Faith and the Five Stages of Practice, WND I, p. 785).

6. This “principle that embracing the Mystic Law is equivalent to the meditative practice of observing one’s mind” does not suggest any tedious practice of gradual development but a quick awakening of instant enlightenment.

“Getting to know that the sentient beings and the environment of the Ten Worlds are the Buddha of the Dharma body, equipped with the virtue of the three bodies in a single entity, one has understood that all phenomena are the Buddha Dharma. This knowledge corresponds to the nominal stage. From this stage on one proceeds immediately to the enlightenment. Thus, in the teaching of perfect and immediate enlightenment there are no successive stages of practice.” The Unanimous Declaration by the Buddhas of the Three Existences, WND II, p. 847 f.

NB is ultimately characterized by the practice to chant daimoku to a mandala Gohonzon that can be seen in a four-layer structure (see my book NB2.0, p. 331).



Yukio Matsudo March 13

Q: I pray for something to the Gohonzon every day, but there is no sign that it will come true.

A: Though there are various aspects, but one important thing is that our practice is a collaborative work with the power of the universe beyond our small ego consciousness. You cannot experience any synchronicity with your own willpower and effort.

--- As Nichiren tells us, we need the power of our subconscious mind and even more, the power of non-local consciousness or pure consciousness, in order to actually realize or attain our wishes. This is what Nichiren had in mind when he drew for us the analogy of a fly clinging to a horse's tail.

A blue-bottle fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles. »On Establishing the Correct Teaching«, WND I, p. 17. - - -

Quote from page 116 of our book »focus your mind — light up your life: Nichiren Buddhism 4.0« ---

In short, Daimoku is a carrier that transmits our wishes. However, in order to do so, it is necessary for us to become one with Gohonzon and to activate the "miracle mechanism of accomplishing wishes" built into it. And for that purpose, it is necessary to have a deep faith that can stop the busy monkey mind, that is, to deepen and strengthen the trust and confidence in the power of daimoku.



Yukio Matsudo about his master-disciple relationship

Quote from my book "The Instant Enlightenment of Ordinary People: Nichiren Buddhism 2.0 for the 21st Century" (2018), p. 73-76:

At this point, to avoid misunderstanding, I would like to briefly describe my personal encounters with Ikeda. For I consider that my own work to be in direct succession to his "Buddhist Humanism", which is an attempt to construct a radically new systematic understanding of NB.

I first met Ikeda personally in May 1981 when he visited Germany. At that time, I was a member of the executive committee, and he just came over to several of us, who were waiting for the next event. He began talking to us quite spontaneously about something which was obviously on his mind: "To tell you the truth, I have a problem, I am going to give a lecture at the University of Sophia soon, but I am in trouble because of translation difficulties". I replied also quite spontaneously and without hesitation: "There are certainly only a few people who can translate directly from Japanese to Bulgarian, but from German it should be much easier. As I am qualified Japanese-German translator, shall I translate your lecture into German?" Ikeda accepted at once: "I would appreciate that, thanks". That was the day before his departure to Bulgaria, so I had to complete the translation overnight. In fact, during that night while I was working, he called me down to the lobby of the hotel. He appeared anxious and wanted to give me some warm words of encouragement. By the next day, his party had already left the hotel. So, as soon as I finished the work, I drove to Frankfurt airport and handed it to his assistant.

Subsequently, as part of his dialogue with Josef Derbolav (1912-1987), professor of philosophy and education at the university of Bonn, I was assigned to the position of coordinator on the German side ((This dialogue was published in German in 1988, in Japanese in 1989 and in English in 1992 with the title

»The Search for a New Humanity«) . In order to work on the translation and publication of the documents relating to the dialogue, I was invited to Japan to have access to resources at SG headquarters, where I remained for about a month. During that stay, I had several opportunities to attend lunch parties and Gongyō, in a very small private circle with Ikeda. Consequently, these encounters also became precious opportunities to get to know Ikeda closely.

When Ikeda visited Europe again in May 1989, I was involved in the executive committee which organized and supported his visit. At that time, I was working freelance and undertaking SGI responsibilities as the national leader of the Young Men's Division and later of the Youth Division. As well as this, I was writing my Ph.D. thesis in Philosophy, although it took me several years to finish. When Ikeda visited the U.K., I had a chance in Taplow Court, the HQ of SGI U.K., to report to him personally, that I had been awarded a doctoral degree. He was very pleased and later arranged to appoint me Director of Research at the newly established European Center of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP). I prepared to establish a library related to Buddhism at Taplow Court, held lectures and meetings with invited scholars from several European countries, and I myself participated in academic conferences related to Buddhism and religious sociology throughout Europe and the US. I served in this position for ten years, between 1990 and 2000.

Subsequently, Ikeda visited Germany several times. In May 1994 there was a lunch meeting with him at a Chinese restaurant in the city of Frankfurt. I sat at the table opposite his. As chance would have it, he turned around and talked to me directly: "One of my relatives ((his son, Hiromasa)) read your book and told me that its theme is most interesting". Albeit subtly and indirectly he thereby transmitted to me his favorable impression of my book on "The Theory of the Ordinary Person as True Buddha", just recently published in Japan. His encouragement allowed me to

feel confident of his support in the midst of the furor occasioned by the fiercely controversial debate on doctrine ((with NST priests and scholars)), which I had to face alone without any organizational support. As I myself was acutely conscious of inheriting and further developing his humanistic approach to NB, I was naturally deeply encouraged by receiving such a “positive response” directly from him.

Here I would like to recount my personal impressions of Ikeda. He is a really kind hearted, caring warm person, as well as being trustworthy. He oversaw my personal development and gave me some concrete opportunities in which to demonstrate my abilities. He also gave me the chance to eat together and to do Gongyo together time after time. And he never abused me by assuming that I would only work pro bono. No, rather, he was attentive to always pay me above the normal rate of remuneration. Consequently, for me, he has been and is a trustworthy mentor, whom I very much admire and to whom I will always be deeply grateful.

So far, I have briefly described some personal encounters with Ikeda. It was my great good fortune and honor to get to know him personally “as an ordinary man” in a very direct manner. Consequently, I felt that I had built a very natural human relationship with him. Conversely, because of this, I myself did not proclaim loudly “the doctrine of the Unity of Master and Disciple”, nor did I demand this from other people. Each person is able to read and listen to his lectures and receive his guidance to as a means of deepening his or her faith. Yet, I always remained very uneasy and deeply repelled at times when the “doctrine of the Unity of Master and Disciple” was blatantly abused as a political ideology intended to maintain the hierarchy and status quo within the organization. For example, the name “Sensei” was often used to simply suppress unwelcome questions or reasonable criticism simply by asserting: “Sensei said this and that”, “This is Sensei’s wish”, “We should not bother Sensei” and so on. Some almost screamed out the name and exhibited an attitude and demeanor

of total obedience and abject surrender. It is quite abnormal and in fact even dangerous to fanatically worship Sensei as an authoritarian guru. Indeed, outside Japan, this kind of “guru worship” deeply tarnished the reputation of SGI, which was perceived by outsiders as an “Ikeda Cult”. As a result, some left the organization. Consequently, I became fearful every time that I heard or read that the “righteous attitude of absolute obedience” was exclusively the “true way of the Master and Disciple” – Yet doesn’t this attitude remind one of an authoritarian belief system found elsewhere? This is most frustrating, as what I have learned from Ikeda personally is the exact opposite: i.e. to take care of everyone sensitively and with true affection and to listen to everyone’s individual concerns and aspirations, in order that each be encouraged and enabled to truly grow spiritually.

Thus, I consider myself to be in succession to Ikeda’s essentially humanistic approach to NB, although I have expanded it by way of a more radical and systematic critique grounded in contemporary Buddhist studies.