

Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō

Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō (南無妙法蓮華經) (also known as ***Nam Myōhō Renge Kyō***)^{[1][2]} (English: *Devotion to the Mystic Law of the Lotus Sutra* or *Glory to the Sutra of the Lotus of the Supreme Law*)^{[3][4]} is the central mantra chanted within all forms of Nichiren Buddhisms as well as Tendai Buddhism.^[5]

The words *Myōhō Renge Kyō* refers to the Japanese title of the Lotus Sūtra. The mantra is referred to as **daimoku** (題目^[6]) or, in honorific form, **o-daimoku** (お題目) meaning *title* and was first revealed by the Japanese Buddhist priest Nichiren on the 28th day of the fourth lunar month of 1253 at Seichō-ji (also called Kiyosumidera) in present-day city of Kamogawa, Chibaprefecture, Japan.^{[7][8]}

The practice of prolonged chanting is referred to as *shōdai* (唱題) while the purpose of chanting daimoku is to reduce sufferings by eradicating negative karma along with reducing karmic punishments both from previous and present lifetimes,^[9] with the goal to attain perfect and complete awakening.^[10]



An inscription of Nam Myoho Renge Kyo at a Nichiren-shū temple in Taiwan.

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Meaning

The Tendai Monks Saicho and Genshin are said to have originated the Daimoku although the Buddhist priest Nichiren is known as the greatest proponent. The mantra is an homage to the Lotus Sutra which is widely credited as the "king of scriptures" and "final word on Buddhism". According to Jacqueline Stone, the Tendai founder Saicho popularized the mantra "Namu Ichijo Myoho Renge Kyo" as a way to honor the Lotus Sutra as the One Vehicle teaching of the Buddha.^[11] Accordingly, the Tendai monk Genshin popularized the mantra "Namu Amida, Namu Kanzeon, Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" to honor the 3 jewels of Japanese Buddhism.^[12] Nichiren, who himself was a Tendai monk, edited these chants down to "Namu Myoho Renge Kyo" and Nichiren Buddhists are responsible for its wide popularity and usage all over the world today

As Nichiren explained the mantra in his *Ongi Kuden*^[13] (御義口伝; Orally transmitted teachings), a transcription of his lectures about the Lotus Sutra, *Namu* (南無) is a transliteration into Japanese of the Sanskrit "*namas*", and *Myōhō Renge Kyō* is the Sino-Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese title of the Lotus Sutra (hence, *Daimoku*, which is a Japanese word meaning 'title'), in the translation by Kumārajīva. Nichiren gives a detailed interpretation of each character (see Ongi kuden#Nam-myoho-renge-kyō) in this text.^[14]

Namu is used in Buddhism as a prefix expressing taking refuge in a Buddha or similar object of veneration. In *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*, it represents devotion or conviction in the Mystic Law of Life (Saddharma) as expounded in the Lotus Sutra, not merely as one of many scriptures, but as the ultimate teaching of Buddhism, particularly with regard to Nichiren's interpretation. The use of *Nam* vs. *Namu* is, amongst traditional Nichiren schools, a linguistic but not necessarily a dogmatic issue,^[15] since *u* is devoted in many

varieties of Japanese.

Linguistically, *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* consists of the following:

- *Namu* 南無 "devoted to", a transliteration of Sanskrit *nāmas*
- *Myōhō* 妙法 "exquisite law"^[16]
 - *Myō* 妙, from Middle Chinese *mièw*, "strange, mystery, miracle, cleverness"
 - *Hō* 法, from Middle Chinese *pjap*, "law, principle, doctrine"
- *Ren* 蓮, from Middle Chinese *selen*, "padma (lotus)"
- *Ge* 華, from Middle Chinese *xwæ*, "flower"
- *Kyō* 經, from Middle Chinese *sjeng*, "sutra"

The Lotus Sutra is held by Nichiren Buddhists, as well as practitioners of the Tiantai and corresponding Japanese Tendai schools, to be the culmination of Gautama Buddha's 50 years of teaching. However, followers of Nichiren Buddhism consider *Myōhō Renge Kyō* to be the name of the ultimate law permeating the universe, and the human being is at one, fundamentally with this law (dharma) and can manifest realization, or Buddha Wisdom (attain Buddhahood), through Buddhist Practice.

The seven characters of the phrase are written down the centre of the gohonzon, the mandala venerated by most Nichiren Buddhists. The veneration towards the mandala is understood by those who believe in it as the veneration for a deeper representation, which they believe to be the Buddha Nature inherent to their own lives.

Precise interpretations of *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō*, how it is pronounced, and its position in Buddhist practice differ slightly among the numerous schools and sub-sects of Nichiren Buddhism, but "I take refuge in (devote or submit myself to) the Wonderful Law of the Lotus Flower Sutra" might serve as a universal translation.

More recently, with the participation of the Nichiren Buddhist order Nipponzan Myōhoji in the peace movement, the mantra has become a more universally recognized prayer for peace. On peace walks it is chanted whilst beating Japanese hand drums, in a practice known as gyakku-Shodai.

In popular culture

This mantra has been associated with influential figures including Mahatma Gandhi and Rosa Parks and has been popularized due to the Peace Stupas built all over India.^[17]

Perhaps the most famous and well-known attribution in pop culture is in Tina Turner's autobiographical movie What's Love Got To Do With It, featuring her conversion to Nichiren Buddhism in the early 1970s through her co-dancer friend Jackie Stanton. In the film, after an attempted suicide, Tina Turner begins to chant this mantra and turns her life around. Turner continues to chant this mantra in public venues such as CNN and in her own spiritual music project Beyond.^[18]

The mantra was used in the final episode of the TV series The Monkees, "The Frodis Caper". Micky claims he received it when he sent in a cereal box top.

The mantra is also present in the 1969 movie Satyricon by Federico Fellini during the grand nude jumping scene of the Patricians.

The mantra is used in The Last Detail by the character played by Randy Quaid as a young sailor on the way to the brig.



A *akejiku Honzon* from the Nichiren Shu school with *Namu Myōhō Renge Kyō* in the center portion.

The mantra is used by the underdog fraternity in the film *Revenge of the Nerds II* in the fake Seminole temple against the Alpha Betas.

In the film *Innerspace*, Tuck Pendleton (played by Dennis Quaid) chants this mantra repeatedly as he encourages Jack Putter to break free from his captors and charge the door of the van he is being held in.

The mantra has been used in contemporary popular culture and appears in songs such as The Pretenders' "Boots of Chinese Plastic"^[19] and Xzibit's "Concentrate".

Notes

1. Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia - Five or seven characters (http://www.chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com/en/index.php?title=Five_or_seven_characters)
2. SGDB 2002, Namu (http://www.sgilibrary.org/search_dict.php?id=1492)
3. SGDB 2002, Lotus Sutra of the Wonderful Law (http://www.sgilibrary.org/search_dict.php?id=1321)
4. Kenkyusha 1991
5. <https://nirc.nanzan-u.ac.jp/nfile/4327>
6. Kenkyusha 1991
7. Anesaki 1916, p.34
8. SGDB 2002, Nichiren (http://www.sgilibrary.org/search_dict.php?id=1526)
9. <http://myohoji.nst.org/NSTMyohoji.aspx?PI=BOF5550>
10. <http://www.sgi.org/about-us/buddhism-in-dailylife/changing-poison-into-medicine.html>
11. Original Enlightenment and the Transformation of Medieval Japanese Buddhism by Jacqueline Stone
12. Re-envisioning Kamakura Buddhism by Richard Payne
13. Watson 2005
14. Masatoshi, Ueki (2001). *Gender equality in Buddhism* Peter Lang. pp. 136, 159–161. ISBN 0820451339
15. Ryuei 1999, Nam or Namu? Does it really matter?
16. Kenkyusha 1991
17. <http://www.livemint.com/Consumer/BZ7pk5BrdnijntpLDgdbN/Exhibition-of-8216Lotus-Sutra8217-in-the-capital.html>
18. <https://tinaturnerblog.com/tag/nam-myoho-enge-kyo/>
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