

The Mirror of Faith: An Analysis of Receptive and Active Power in Nichiren Daishonin's "The True Aspect of All Phenomena"

Part I: The Foundation of Faith - Context and Object

The teachings of the 13th-century Japanese Buddhist reformer Nichiren Daishonin (1222–1282) on the nature of faith and the attainment of Buddhahood are not abstract theological constructs. They were forged in the crucible of intense personal and societal turmoil, and their practical application is inextricably linked to a specific object of devotion, the Great Mandala Gohonzon. To comprehend the profound dual dynamic of protection—both that which is received from the Buddhas and that which is actively manifested to protect others—one must first understand the historical and doctrinal foundations upon which these teachings rest. The passage from Nichiren's letter, *Shohō-Jissō Shō* (The True Aspect of All Phenomena), is a product of its time and place, a message of ultimate empowerment delivered from a context of extreme adversity.

Section 1: The Crucible of Sado Island: Nichiren, Sairen-bō, and the Latter Day of the Law

The Kamakura period (1185–1333) in Japan was a time of profound social and political upheaval. Power had shifted from the imperial court nobility to a military dictatorship, the shogunate, leading to endemic conflict.¹ This era of instability was compounded by a series of devastating natural disasters, including earthquakes, famines, and plagues, which engendered a widespread sense of pessimism.² Within the Buddhist worldview of the time, these conditions were widely interpreted as signs of the arrival of the Latter Day of the Law, or *mappō*. This was a prophesied degenerate age, beginning two thousand years after the

passing of Śākyamuni Buddha, in which his teachings would become obscured and lose their power to lead people to enlightenment.¹ It was into this turbulent world that Nichiren was born, the son of common fishermen, a fact that deeply informed his lifelong concern for the plight of ordinary people.²

From a young age, Nichiren dedicated himself to Buddhist study, vowing to become the "wisest person in Japan" in order to find a teaching that could overcome the fundamental sufferings of life and death.³ After more than two decades of intensive study at major centers of Buddhist learning, including the great Tendai monastery of Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei, he concluded that the *Lotus Sūtra* represented the highest and most complete expression of the Buddha's enlightenment.¹ He further identified its essence in its title, *Myōho-renge-kyō*, and the invocation *Nam-myōho-renge-kyō* as the direct path to Buddhahood for all people in the age of *mappō*.² On April 28, 1253, he publicly declared this teaching, refuting the established schools of his day—such as Pure Land (Nembutsu), Zen, and Shingon—as erroneous and unsuited for the time.⁵

This declaration set him on a collision course with the religious and political authorities. His insistence that adherence to these "erroneous teachings" was the root cause of the nation's calamities, and that only faith in the *Lotus Sūtra* could establish a peaceful and prosperous land, was seen as a direct challenge to the established order.⁵ Consequently, his life became one of unrelenting hardship and persecution, including armed attacks, ambushes, and official government sanctions.² He was exiled to the Izu Peninsula in 1261.⁵ The climax of these persecutions occurred on the twelfth day of the ninth month, 1271, when he was arrested and taken to Tatsunokuchi beach to be secretly beheaded. According to his own accounts, at the moment the executioner raised his sword, a brilliant luminous object shot across the sky, terrifying the officials and causing them to call off the execution.²

This event, known as the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, marked a pivotal turning point in Nichiren's life and the development of his teachings. He referred to this moment as the time when he "cast off the transient and revealed the true" (*hosshaku kempon*).⁸ From this point forward, he no longer identified himself merely as a votary or practitioner of the *Lotus Sūtra*, but began to act with the authority of his original identity as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, whose mission was to establish the teaching of *Nam-myōho-renge-kyō* for the enlightenment of all humanity.² It was after this event that he was exiled to Sado Island, a remote and harsh location where he faced extreme deprivation of food, clothing, and shelter. It was from his small dwelling at Ichinosawa on Sado that he wrote many of his most important treatises, including the letter in question, *Shōhō-Jissō Shō*, in the fifth month of 1273.¹⁰

The letter was addressed to Sairen-bō Nichijō, a former Tendai priest who was also in exile on Sado.¹⁰ Sairen-bō, being a learned scholar, was already familiar with the complex Tendai doctrine of "the true aspect of all phenomena," but sought a deeper understanding from Nichiren.¹⁰ He had converted to Nichiren's teachings only a few months earlier, in the second

month of 1272, and pledged to become his disciple.¹² The shared experience of persecution and exile forged a profound bond between the two men. Nichiren's letters to Sairen-bō are not merely doctrinal explanations; they are powerful encouragements designed to solidify his disciple's faith in the face of life-threatening circumstances. When Nichiren writes, "Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be known as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life," he is underscoring the resolute conviction required to persevere when all external conditions are hostile.¹⁵

The act of composing such profound philosophical works under these conditions reveals a deeper purpose. Nichiren was not simply consoling a follower; he was actively forging a successor. By entrusting his deepest teachings to a learned former priest who was sharing his suffering, Nichiren was testing and tempering Sairen-bō's conviction. This was a strategic act of mentorship, transforming a crisis that threatened to extinguish his teachings into a pivotal moment for ensuring their future transmission. The letters from Sado, therefore, must be read not as abstract philosophy, but as intensely practical guidance for maintaining faith and achieving victory in the midst of the most severe adversity imaginable.

Section 2: The Great Mandala Gohonzon: Banner of Propagation and Mirror for the Mind

Central to the passage from *Shohō-Jissō Shō* is the injunction to "Have faith in the Great Mandala Gohonzon, the Most Venerable One in the entire world".¹⁶ The Gohonzon is the physical embodiment of the ultimate reality Nichiren sought to convey and the object of devotion for practitioners of his Buddhism. It is not a statue or icon in the traditional sense, but a calligraphic mandala (*moji-mandala*) inscribed by Nichiren in Chinese and Sanskrit characters on a scroll of paper or wood.¹⁷ After the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and his subsequent exile to Sado, Nichiren began to inscribe the Gohonzon for his followers, providing them with a concrete object to which they could direct their practice.²

Doctrinally, the Gohonzon is a graphic representation of the Mystic Law, *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō*, to which Nichiren was enlightened.² Its composition symbolizes a key scene from the *Lotus Sūtra* known as the "Ceremony in the Air," described in the eleventh chapter, "The Emergence of the Treasure Tower".¹⁷ In this ceremony, a magnificent Treasure Tower emerges from the earth, and the Buddha of the past, Many Treasures (Tahō), appears within it to validate the truth of Śākyamuni's teachings. Śākyamuni then enters the tower and sits beside him, and all the Buddhas from throughout the universe gather. This cosmic assembly represents the eternal and universal truth that the state of Buddhahood is inherent in all life.⁹ In the Gohonzon, the phrase *Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō-Nichiren* is inscribed in bold characters down the center, representing this Treasure Tower and the oneness of the Person

(Nichiren, the Buddha of the Latter Day) and the Law (*Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*).²¹

Arranged around this central inscription are the names of Śākyamuni and Many Treasures, various bodhisattvas, great sages, and protective deities from Buddhist, Vedic, and Chinese traditions.¹⁷ Crucially, the Gohonzon also includes figures representing all of the Ten Worlds or life-states, from the highest state of Buddhahood down to the lowest state of Hell, represented by Devadatta, Śākyamuni's treacherous cousin.²² This comprehensive depiction is a profound philosophical statement. Nichiren taught that all phenomena, and by extension all beings in any of the Ten Worlds, are manifestations of the Mystic Law.¹⁰ As he wrote, "Illuminated by the light of the five characters of the Mystic Law, they display the dignified attributes that they inherently possess. This is the object of devotion".¹⁷

The function of the Gohonzon for the practitioner is therefore not that of an external deity to be worshipped, but that of a "clear mirror" to reflect the practitioner's own innate enlightened nature.¹⁹ It is "the object of devotion for observing the mind".⁹ By chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* while focusing on the Gohonzon, the practitioner is, in effect, calling forth the same enlightened state of life from within themselves. The process is described as *kyochi myogo*, the fusion of the subjective reality of the practitioner and the objective wisdom of the Buddha.²⁵ As Jacqueline Stone notes, "By having faith in the daimoku and chanting it before this object of worship, one could in effect enter the mandala and participate in the enlightened reality that it depicts".¹⁷

This understanding of the Gohonzon's function radically redefines the nature of enlightenment and protection. The inclusion of figures from all Ten Worlds, including negative ones, signifies that Buddhahood is not achieved by eradicating earthly desires, suffering, or negativity, but by illuminating and transforming them. This is consistent with core tenets of Nichiren's teaching such as "earthly desires are enlightenment" (*bonnō soku bodaï*) and "the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana" (*shōji soku nehan*).⁵ These principles are explicitly represented on the Gohonzon by the Sanskrit characters for the wisdom kings Aizen Myō-ō and Fudō Myō-ō. Aizen represents the principle of transforming earthly desires into enlightenment, while Fudō represents the transformation of the sufferings of life and death into the tranquil state of nirvana.⁹ The Gohonzon is thus not merely a mirror of one's potential for good, but a mirror of one's entire life in all its complexity. Devotion becomes an act of illuminating one's whole self—including anger, greed, and delusion—with the light of the Mystic Law, thereby transforming these states into sources of wisdom, compassion, and courage. This redefines "protection" from a passive shield against harm into an active catalyst for profound spiritual alchemy, where sufferings become the "firewood" to fuel the flames of joy and wisdom.²²

Finally, Nichiren also referred to the Gohonzon as the "banner of propagation".⁹ This signifies its role as the standard for the movement to spread his teachings and achieve *kosen-rufu*—world peace through the establishment of the correct teaching. It is both a

deeply personal object for individual transformation and a universal standard for the collective mission of creating a peaceful society.

Part II: The Dynamics of Protection - A Dual Interpretation

The passage from *Shohō-Jissō Shō* invites two complementary readings regarding the "protective powers" that arise from faith. The first is a receptive interpretation, where the practitioner's faith acts as a conduit, drawing protection from external benevolent forces. The second is an active interpretation, where faith becomes the wellspring of an internal transformation, manifesting as the power to protect oneself and others. These two dynamics are not contradictory but represent two sides of a single, non-dual process rooted in the Mahayana principle of the oneness of self and environment.

Section 3: "The Protective Powers of the Buddhas": Faith as a Conduit for External Blessing

The first interpretation of Nichiren's promise focuses on the receptive power of faith. The passage explicitly states that by earnestly strengthening one's faith in the Gohonzon, one may "be blessed with the protective powers of Śākyamuni Buddha, the Buddha of many treasures, and Buddhas in manifestation throughout the Universe".¹⁶ This is a recurring theme in Nichiren's writings. He consistently taught that a sincere and steadfast practitioner of the *Lotus Sūtra* would naturally elicit the protection of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as a host of benevolent heavenly deities (*shoten zenjin* or *gohō zenjin*) who are described in the sutra as having vowed to protect its votaries.²⁶ This dynamic is referred to as "protection from without" (*gego*)—a protective function that appears in one's environment.²⁷

This protection, however, is not an unconditional or magical guarantee of a life free from hardship. It is presented as a direct response to the strength and sincerity of the practitioner's faith. As Nichiren states, quoting an earlier Buddhist principle, "The stronger one's faith, the greater the protection of the gods".¹¹ This establishes a clear causal relationship: the depth of one's inner resolve determines the degree of external support one receives. Faith acts as the essential catalyst. Nichiren illustrates this with the concept of faith "like flowing water," which is continuous and ever-advancing, in contrast to faith "like fire," which flares up passionately but is easily extinguished.²⁶ It is the former, consistent and

unwavering faith, that ensures the constant flow of protection.

This framework provides a powerful means of re-contextualizing suffering, a crucial element for practitioners like Sairen-bō who were facing extreme persecution. From this perspective, the emergence of obstacles or hardships is not necessarily a sign that protection has failed. On the contrary, it can be interpreted as evidence of the strength of one's practice. Nichiren taught that anyone who correctly practices the *Lotus Sūtra* in the Latter Day of the Law will inevitably be assailed by the "three powerful enemies"—arrogant lay people, arrogant priests, and arrogant high-ranking priests who conspire with secular authorities to persecute the sutra's votaries.⁸ The appearance of such opposition is thus not a mark of failure but a form of "actual proof" that one is walking the correct path.²⁸ Nichiren himself viewed the persecutions he faced as validation of the sutra's prophecies, and he encouraged his followers to meet obstacles with joy, writing, "The greater the hardships befalling him, the greater the delight he feels, because of his strong faith".²⁹

Furthermore, Nichiren sometimes framed adversity as a test orchestrated by the protective deities themselves. In a letter to a follower whose family was experiencing illness, he wrote, "Probably the ten demon daughters are testing the strength of your faith".²⁶ This reframing transforms a potentially faith-destroying experience into an opportunity to deepen one's resolve. The obstacles become akin to "logs" that, when added to a fire, make it burn even higher.³⁰ This concept is also linked to the principle of "lessening one's karmic retribution" (*tenju kyōju*), which posits that through the benefit of practice, one can experience the effects of heavy negative karma from past lifetimes in a much lighter form in the present.⁸ Therefore, what an outside observer might see as misfortune—illness, poverty, or exile—the practitioner is encouraged to view as a sign of profound karmic purification and a testament to the protective function of their faith. The "protection of the Buddhas" is thus not a supernatural shield that prevents all hardship, but a profound cognitive and spiritual framework that allows the practitioner to endure adversity, find deep meaning within it, and emerge with a strengthened and elevated state of life. Faith is transformed from a simple plea for comfort into a powerful engine for resilience and ultimate victory.

Section 4: "The Power to Protect Others": Faith as the Wellspring of Internal Transformation

The second, active interpretation shifts the focus from what the practitioner receives to what they manifest from within. This perspective holds that as faith develops, so too does the practitioner's own inherent power to protect themselves and others, free them from suffering, and help them awaken their own Buddha nature. This is not a power bestowed from an external source but the natural efflorescence of the Buddhahood that exists innately within

one's own life. The core purpose of Nichiren's teaching is to enable all people to "reveal their innate buddhahood".⁵ Faith in Nichiren Buddhism is fundamentally different from faith in an external, omnipotent deity; it is faith in one's own inner potential and the potential of all people.³¹

The mechanism for this internal transformation is the practice of chanting *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* to the Gohonzon. This act summons forth the "Buddha nature" from the depths of one's life, activating the limitless wisdom, courage, and compassion that constitute the state of Buddhahood.²⁸ This process is what Soka Gakkai second president Josei Toda and current president Daisaku Ikeda have termed the "human revolution".³⁴ It is a fundamental inner transformation that changes one's core disposition from one of helplessness and complaint to one of empowerment and responsibility. This is the "manifestation from within" (*naikun*), which literally means "to send forth a fragrance from within." Through correct Buddhist practice, the Buddha nature is drawn out, enabling practitioners to attain benefits and, as a result, "provide protection for themselves".²⁷

The practical results of this inner transformation are profound. By tapping into their inherent life force, practitioners develop the wisdom to see the true nature of their problems and the courage to take effective action to solve them.³¹ They learn to transform negative tendencies and overcome the karmic patterns that cause suffering for themselves and others. A person who establishes this "absolutely unshakable state of happiness" naturally becomes a source of stability, hope, and inspiration for their family, friends, and community.³⁶ Their actions, now guided by compassion rather than ego, create value and contribute to the well-being of their environment.

This process is vividly illustrated in the personal experiences of modern-day practitioners, which serve as a form of "actual proof" of the teaching's validity. One individual, raised in an abusive environment and believing himself to be worthless, began chanting to respect the lives of others. This act of compassion for others unlocked the ability to see his own inherent value, giving him the courage to mend his relationship with his parents and use his experiences to help others overcome violence.³⁷ Another, facing financial ruin due to his own arrogance and greed, was prompted by his practice to reflect on his character. This inner change led to a transformation in his management style, which in turn restored morale in his company and opened the way for its financial recovery.³⁸ In these and countless other cases, the "power to protect" is not a mystical force but the tangible result of a profound change in one's heart and mind, which then manifests in concrete, positive action.³⁹

This dynamic reveals that the power to protect others is not a separate, altruistic goal to be pursued after one's own enlightenment has been secured. It is, rather, the very mechanism of one's own enlightenment. Nichiren's teachings are structured around the "two ways of practice and study," which explicitly include "practice for oneself" and "practice for others".³¹ These are likened to the two wheels of a cart; both are essential to move forward.³¹ By striving

for the happiness of another person—the practice for others—one is forced to confront their own internal obstacles, such as doubt, fear, and ego (the "lesser self"). This challenge deepens their own faith and elevates their life-condition. This newly elevated life-state, in turn, makes them more effective in their efforts to help others. The two are thus bound in a virtuous cycle, a feedback loop of mutual elevation. The power to protect others is not the result of attaining Buddhahood; it is the active, compassionate process of attaining Buddhahood itself.

Section 5: The Non-Duality of Self and Other: Synthesizing the Twofold Nature of Protection

The distinction between the receptive protection from without and the active power manifested from within is ultimately an expedient means for understanding a single, unified reality. The synthesis of these two interpretations lies in the profound Mahayana doctrine of the non-duality of the individual and their environment. In the letter to Sairen-bō, Nichiren explains that "the true aspect of all phenomena" means that "all beings and environments in the Ten Worlds... are without exception manifestations of Myoho-enge-kyo".¹⁰ This principle, which he inherited and developed from the Tendai school, is also expressed as the "oneness of life and its environment" (*eshō funi*).⁴⁴ This doctrine posits that the subjective self (*shō*) and the objective environment (*e*) are not two separate things but are inextricably linked and mutually influential—they are "non-dual" (*funi*).

From this standpoint, a fundamental change in one's inner life-state must inevitably manifest as a corresponding change in one's outer world. The internal transformation achieved through faith and practice (*naikun*, or manifestation from within) is the direct cause for the appearance of protective functions in the environment (*gego*, or protection from without). The two are a single phenomenon viewed from different perspectives.²⁷ When a practitioner chants with strong faith, they are polishing the mirror of their own life. As their inner world becomes brighter and more powerful, this change is reflected in their external circumstances. Obstacles that once seemed insurmountable may recede, or allies and support may appear at crucial moments. This is not a coincidence or a magical intervention, but the natural functioning of the law of cause and effect operating across the indivisible fabric of self and environment.

As SGI President Ikeda explains, "according to the principle of the oneness of life and its environment, when our life state changes, we can change our environment as well and thereby solve all our problems".³⁴ The "protective powers of the Buddhas" are not external agents acting upon a passive recipient. Rather, the Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and benevolent deities described on the Gohonzon represent the positive, protective functions inherent in the

universe itself. By aligning one's own life with the fundamental rhythm of that universe through the practice of chanting *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, one activates these latent protective forces both within oneself and in one's surroundings.

Therefore, the receptive and active interpretations of protection are not a dichotomy but a dynamic unity. The faith that draws forth protection from the Buddhas is the very same faith that unlocks the practitioner's own inner Buddhahood. The power that manifests from within to protect others is the same power that transforms one's environment and calls forth support from the cosmos. The act of praying for another's happiness is simultaneously an act of polishing one's own life. When one's life is polished, the entire universe responds in kind. The two ways of reading the passage in *Shohō-Jissō Shō* thus merge into one: to develop one's faith is to become a powerful nexus of transformation, receiving and radiating protection in a seamless, compassionate flow.

Part III: The Engine of Attainment - Practice, Study, and Propagation

The dynamic interplay of faith and protection, both receptive and active, is not a passive state but is activated and sustained through a concrete methodology. Nichiren Daishonin clearly outlines this methodology in the same letter to Sairen-bō, urging him to "Strive to carry out the two ways of practice and learning. Without practice and learning Buddhism will cease to exist".¹⁶ This framework of faith, practice, and study forms the engine of attainment in Nichiren Buddhism, with the act of propagation emerging as the ultimate expression of a mature and powerful faith.

Section 6: "The Two Ways of Practice and Study": The Inseparable Wheels of Human Revolution

The phrase "the two ways of practice and study" (*gyōgaku nigyō*) encapsulates the essential discipline of Nichiren Buddhism. It is a comprehensive system designed to foster a robust and reasoned faith that translates into tangible results in daily life. Nichiren asserts that these two elements are indispensable: "Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism".³² These two ways, however, are not independent pillars; they both arise from the foundation of faith.²⁸

"Practice" (*gyō*) is itself twofold, comprising "practice for oneself" (*jigyō*) and "practice for

others" (*keta*).³¹

- **Practice for Oneself (*jigyō*):** This is the core personal discipline. It primarily consists of the daily practice of *gongyō*, which involves chanting the invocation *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* (referred to as the *daimoku*) and reciting key excerpts from the second ("Expedient Means") and sixteenth ("Life Span of the Thus Come One") chapters of the *Lotus Sūtra* before the Gohonzon.³¹ This daily practice is the engine for one's "human revolution," serving to purify one's life, tap into one's inherent Buddha nature, and establish a high life condition of wisdom, courage, and compassion.³¹
- **Practice for Others (*keta*):** This involves all actions taken for the sake of others' happiness based on the Law. Its most fundamental expression is teaching others about *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*, helping them establish their own practice, and thereby enabling them to also transform their lives.³¹ This includes sharing Buddhism with others and participating in community activities aimed at spreading the humanistic philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism.³⁴ These two aspects of practice are likened to the two wheels of a cart: both are necessary to move forward.³¹

"Study" (*gaku*) is the second essential way. This involves diligently reading and seeking to understand the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, known as the *Gosho*, as well as the *Lotus Sūtra* itself.³¹ The purpose of study is not mere academic accumulation of knowledge. It is to deepen one's conviction, strengthen one's faith, and gain a correct understanding of the principles of the teaching so that one can apply them more effectively in daily life.⁴³ Study ensures that faith does not become blind or superstitious but is grounded in reason. It provides a "compass" for navigating life's challenges and helps one avoid being misled by personal opinions or incorrect interpretations that would hinder one's ability to bring forth their full potential.³¹

Together, faith, practice, and study form a synergistic triad that drives spiritual growth. As the Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism explains, "Faith gives rise to practice and study, and practice and study serve to deepen faith".⁴⁷ This creates a positive feedback loop: one's initial faith prompts one to chant (*jigyō*) and study the teachings (*gaku*). The benefits and understanding gained from this practice and study reinforce and deepen one's faith, which in turn inspires one to share the teaching with others (*keta*). This complete cycle propels the individual's "human revolution" and contributes to the broader goal of *kosen-rufu*.

The unique character of Nichiren's system of practice becomes clearer when contrasted with the other major schools of Kamakura Buddhism, particularly Pure Land and Zen. While all are Mahayana traditions aiming for enlightenment, their methodologies and the nature of their devotional focus differ significantly.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Core Practices in Kamakura Buddhism

School
Nichiren Buddhism
Pure Land Buddhism (Jōdo Shū / Jōdo Shinshū)
Zen Buddhism (Rinzai / Sōtō)

This comparison highlights the distinctive position of Nichiren's practice. While Pure Land schools emphasized reliance on the "other-power" of Amida Buddha for salvation in a future life, and Zen emphasized the "self-power" of meditation for a direct, non-conceptual awakening, Nichiren's practice of chanting to the Gohonzon integrates these polarities. It is an act of "self-power" in that it is the practitioner's own voice and determination that drives the practice. Yet, it simultaneously taps into the "other-power" of the universal Mystic Law embodied in the Gohonzon. It is this fusion that makes the seemingly simple act of chanting a profound practice for transforming one's reality in this lifetime.³³

Section 7: "Spread Even a Word or Phrase": Propagation as the Ultimate Practice of Protection

The concluding instruction in the pivotal passage from *Shohō-Jissō Shō* is to "endeavor yourself and cause others to take up these two ways of practice and learning... If possible, please spread even a word or phrase of the sutra to others".¹⁶ This is not a mere postscript or a casual suggestion; it is the culmination of the entire teaching on faith and protection. In Nichiren's Buddhism, the act of propagation—sharing the teaching with others—is the ultimate expression of a mature faith and the most profound and effective way to protect both oneself and others.

By teaching another person the practice of chanting *Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō*, one is not simply imparting information. One is giving them the fundamental tool to activate their own innate Buddhahood, to conduct their own "human revolution," and to build an unshakable state of happiness from within.³¹ This constitutes the ultimate form of protection, for it empowers individuals with the capacity to protect themselves from the inside out, transforming their own karma and navigating any hardship. This act of compassionate sharing is the highest form of Bodhisattva practice in the Latter Day of the Law.³⁴

This practice of propagation, known as *shakubuku* (a direct refutation of mistaken views and a

proactive sharing of the correct teaching), is central to Nichiren's vision. He established "five guides for propagation"—a systematic framework for determining the right teaching, for the right people, at the right time, in the right country, and in the right sequence—which led him to conclude that *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* was the teaching to be spread throughout the world in the current age.⁵⁵ The goal of this propagation is *kosen-rufu*, a term that signifies world peace achieved through the widespread acceptance of this humanistic philosophy.⁵ This "great desire for widespread propagation" is not a mundane ambition but is described as being synonymous with the Buddha's own life-state. Therefore, dedicating one's life to this goal is the most direct path to attaining Buddhahood.⁵⁷

This principle radically democratizes the path to enlightenment and the power of propagation. In the hierarchical religious world of Kamakura Japan, teaching the Dharma was the exclusive domain of the ordained clergy, often requiring years of scholarly training.¹ Nichiren's injunction to "spread even a word or phrase" shatters this paradigm. It empowers every single practitioner, regardless of their gender, social status, or level of education, to be a powerful agent for positive change.¹¹ The ability to lead another person to enlightenment is placed directly into the hands of the laity. One does not need to be a master of complex doctrines; one only needs the compassion and courage to share a single, powerful truth that has transformed their own life.³⁴

This structural innovation is the key to the teaching's durability and its potential as a global lay movement. It creates a self-contained, self-replicating system for attaining Buddhahood that is not dependent on a clerical hierarchy. The "practical results of faith" are thus made universally accessible. The act of sharing the teaching perfectly unifies the receptive and active dynamics of protection. In striving to help another, the practitioner deepens their own faith and life-condition, thereby receiving greater protection from the universe. In sharing the Law, they give another person the means for their own liberation, enacting the highest form of protection. In this single, compassionate action, the protection of self and the protection of others become one.

Conclusion

The passage from Nichiren Daishonin's *Shohō-Jissō Shō* offers a profound and multi-layered understanding of the relationship between faith, protection, and practice. The analysis reveals that the two interpretations presented in the query—faith as a conduit for receiving protection and faith as the source of power to protect others—are not alternative readings but are two inseparable facets of a single, non-dual reality.

1. **Faith is Transformative, Not Transactional:** Faith in the Great Mandala Gohonzon is not a transactional plea to an external deity for intervention. It is an active, transformative

process. The Gohonzon functions as a mirror, and the practice of chanting *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* is the method for polishing one's life to reflect the inherent Buddhahood it depicts. This internal transformation, or "human revolution," is the fundamental source of all protection.

2. **Protection is Re-contextualized as Resilience:** The "protective powers of the Buddhas" do not manifest as a shield from all hardship. Rather, they represent a spiritual and cognitive framework that allows the practitioner to re-contextualize suffering. Obstacles become "actual proof" of correct practice, opportunities for karmic purification, and fuel for spiritual growth. Protection is thus redefined from the absence of adversity to the unwavering resilience and joy one can manifest in its midst.
3. **The Protection of Self and Others is a Unified Process:** Based on the principle of the oneness of life and its environment (*eshō funi*), the distinction between internal power and external protection dissolves. A change in one's inner life (*naikun*) inevitably creates a corresponding change in the outer world, which includes the appearance of protective functions (*gego*). Furthermore, the practice for others (*keta*) is the very mechanism that deepens one's own life-state (*jigyō*). The Bodhisattva path is not a linear sequence but a dynamic, simultaneous process of mutual elevation.
4. **Propagation is the Ultimate Expression of Faith:** The injunction to "spread even a word or phrase" is the ultimate synthesis of these principles. It is the most direct way to protect others by empowering them with the means for their own liberation. In doing so, the practitioner is fulfilling the Buddha's will, aligning their life with the grand cosmic purpose of *kosen-rufu*, and thereby walking the most direct path to their own enlightenment.

In conclusion, Nichiren's message to Sairen-bō, written from the depths of exile, is one of radical empowerment. It teaches that through the pillars of faith, practice, and study, any individual can transform their destiny. By developing faith in the Gohonzon, they activate a powerful dynamic wherein they both receive the blessings of the cosmos and become a source of strength and hope for others. The practical results of this faith are not the circumvention of life's challenges, but the manifestation of an indomitable spirit capable of turning any poison into medicine and creating profound value from even the harshest of circumstances.

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