

Did the practices of Shakyamuni-Buddha's day differ from the practices of Nichiren today

Question:

Hi Sifu, you mentioned how the lotus states that all people can attain full awakening if they practice this sutra. However, **how did students in Shakyamuni's time practice the lotus** if chanting of the daimoku as a meditative practice had not been developed yet? What meditative practices were they using instead?

Answer:

Excellent, excellent!

There are several aspects to evaluate in order to get a full picture of the scope of this questions.

Firstly:

The Daimoku is described in myriad ways on this YouTube channel, our ThreefoldLotus website study page, and is the scholarship of many abbots, monks, and teachers as well as Nichiren. In some of these descriptions the title of the **Sutra of the Wonderful Lotus Flower is the integral structure of the Daimoku**. The characters of Na and Mu are defined in various form of a dedicated mind. The mind dedicated to the invocation of our innate Buddha Nature. We know this as we continue to define the characters Ren and Ge. The "Wonderful Flower" itself. Wonderful yes, but not simply for its beauty, fragrance, and characteristics. It is wonderful, because of the teaching of the Lotus Bodhisattva. The Lotus Sutra demanded a shift in the understanding of the monks at that time. The capacity of the monks was being challenged to grow. In similar ways, the shift of growth and comprehension was demanded with each successive teaching, sutra to sutra. From the wonder of **potential** (Myo) to **manifest** (Ho), to the pillars of **teachings** and **study** (Kyo), the methods appear to evolve and change while the goal or target remained always, the enlightenment.

Secondly:

And integral to the first, the capacity of the people in Shakyamuni's day were struggling with the very idea that their enlightenment was a matter of a personal commitment and actualizing an already existent state of consciousness. We must remember that Buddhism is a science of the Mind. The writings of countless monks attest to the litany of privations and self castigation the monks and people were want to perform in order to attain or achieve levels of knowledge and enlightenment.

The fact is that it was not until the era of Mappo, when the entire world population would be in complete disarray and desperate for guidance, that people would attain the capacity to invoke mandates and personal targets; to manifest new and previously un-experienced mental abilities, insights, and knowledge with great intent. The Daimoku was a perfect concatenation of all the teachings that reach culmination in the teachings of Lotus Sutra. This is also discussed in multiple documents on the study page of our website.

Thirdly;

Today's cultures are extremely individual identity based. The ego is truly allowed and even encouraged to reign absolute even in the group empowerment of the many, as in a mob, the individuals all perceive themselves as unique. Compare this to the largely agrarian cultures of India and China in the early centuries of Buddhist practice and the preciousness of study and even to have instruction for all these teachings. There were not a plethora of printed materials to distribute to any who would practice. It was much more the custom, adopted of groups gathering, under the purpose of listening and discussion of a particular teaching. This teaching was shared by an honored guest who was learned in the teaching to recite it from memory, or possibly with a rare written transcript to share with the group. This is a practice we have adopted to this very day with our meetings with one or several others, and even as we are doing now, on our channel and website, to share our experience and the writings of our teachers from Shakyamuni to Nichiren.

Fourthly;

Turning again to the "Time and the Capacity", and without reviewing all the information and teachings on the various sects created over years from early to middle teachings and later Tripitaka and the various stages of monk students, teachers and leaders. Ultimately, it was the Lotus teachings that integrated the behaviors and practice of any individual aspiring to embody the Buddha enlightenment. Three consistent practices are pillars to this day. The Study, the Recitations, and ultimately, the Resolve (intent) to stay the course.

Conclusion;

Nichiren taught that chanting the Daimoku should be done with the single mind of embodying Buddha. Nichiren also taught that the Daimoku and the Mandala of the Lotus Sutra are summations of Shakyamuni-Buddha's entire lifetime of teachings. There is merit for these statements as I have said many times, Shakyamuni taught the very same thing throughout his life. He used many "expedient means" to reach the minds of those of his day while ensuring the continued promotion and spread of his teachings. Nichiren, recognizing his own "Time" and the capacity of the people of this age or era, was able to clearly see and synthesize what his teachers had perceived but not yet fully understood. Therefore there may appear to be some great differences in our practice today from those practices of over 2500 years past; however, we are simply performing the practices in concert with our capacity of this era. The practices differ in appearance, but are the same in meaning and intent.