

## The Number of the Characters of the Lotus Sutra Translated in Chinese and the Merit of Odaimoku

The Lotus Sutra we recite is one of three versions translated in Chinese, which are *Shō Hokekyō* 正法華經 translated by Dharmarakṣa (*Jiku Hōgo* 竺法護), *Tempor Hokekyō* 添品法華經 by Jñānagupta (*Janakutta* 闍那崛多), and *Myōhō Renge Kyō* 妙法蓮華經 by Kumārajīva (*Kumarajū* 鳩摩羅什).

Nichiren Shū uses *Myōhō Renge Kyō* and there are various opinions about the number of the characters this sutra contains. Nichiren Shōnin refers to its number in his writing *Thank-you Noe for a Clerical Robe and an Unlinked Kimono (On-Koromo Narabini Hitoe Goshō* 御衣並単衣御書), which was written in 1275 as an appreciation letter for the offering of the kimono and cloth for the robe from the wife of *Tōki Jōnin* 富木常忍; “The Lotus Sutra has 69,384 characters and each of them is a Buddha.”

Chōkyō-ge, which is considered composed by Grand Master *T'ian Tai Zhi Yi* (*Tendai Daishi Chigi* 天台大師智顛) who propagated the Lotus Sutra in China, also says that each character written in the Lotus Sutra should be the Buddha itself as following; “I deeply bow to the Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Dharma, Saddharma Pundarika, of a unit of the 8 volumes containing 28 chapters composed of 69,384 characters. Each character of this sutra is the True Buddha. The True Buddha’s preaching benefits the living beings. All the living beings will have attained the Way of the Buddha. Thus, I bow to the Lotus Sutra.”

The numbers of the 7 characters of Odaimoku divided by *Myōhō Renge Kyō* of 69,384 characters is 9,912. Hence, approximately 10,000 times of chanting the Odaimoku is equivalent to reciting the whole 8 volumes of Lotus Sutra, in terms of the numbers of characters. You may see some temples have the monument with Odaimoku carved “Humbly fulfilled to chant 10,000 Odaimoku,” which tells that they accumulated the same merit as chanting the whole Lotus Sutra by chanting 10,000 Odaimoku. In order to contribute in accumulating this merit for their temple, the followers participate in the activities and chant Odaimoku.

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