

Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin
March 2015, Oko Lecture

Faith and Practice Based on the Transmission of the Lifblood Heritage of the Law

The grand commemorative ceremony celebrating the 770th anniversary of the birth of Second High Priest Nikko Shonin was magnificently and solemnly held at Head Temple Taiseikiji under the great leadership of High Priest Nichinyo Shonin, on both the seventh and eighth of March. Additionally, commemorative ceremonies and meetings to celebrate the success of the 50 percent increase in the Hokkeko membership will be held over a period of ten days, starting on March 22nd. As it has been announced, a commemorative ceremony and meeting for overseas Hokkeko believers will be held on April 19th. I ask those of you, who have the opportunity to go on a tozan pilgrimage for this commemorative ceremony, to appreciate your good fortune and benefit, being mindful that you are representatives of your country. Please share your tozan experiences with everyone after you return.

I also ask those of you who, for various reasons, are unable to attend the ceremony on this occasion, to devote yourselves proudly and propagate the great Law at this truly significant time, by striving to firmly establish the 50 percent increase in the Hokkeko membership and to accomplish our objective of 800,000 believers. There is absolutely no doubt that you will receive the praise of both Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.

Nichiren Shoshu, the faith that we embrace, is the one and only true school of Buddhism that upholds our master Nichiren Daishonin as the True Buddha. The Daishonin will bring salvation to all mankind—common mortals without the seed of Buddhahood (*hon mi uzen*)—in the muddled and evil age of the Latter Day of the Law. Nichiren Shoshu is the one and only true school of Buddhism because the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching and the entirety of the entity of the Law and the profound doctrines, which all mankind in the Latter Day of the Law must revere and embrace to attain enlightenment, have been passed down and transmitted strictly and secretly to this day. They have been entrusted through the transmission of the Heritage of the Law to Nikko Shonin and to the successive High Priests of the Head Temple, like water transferred completely from one vessel to another.

Of the many disciples of Nichiren Daishonin, only Nikko Shonin was able to realize and understand that the Daishonin is the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. He was able to arrive at this essential conclusion because he upheld

absolute faith, based on the master and disciple relationship with the true master, Nichiren Daishonin. Wherever Nichiren Daishonin went, Nikko Shonin was at his side, like a shadow that follows the body. He attended to the Daishonin in every way and underwent difficulties and hardships together with him. Through Nikko Shonin's actions, we can observe the prime point of the relationship between master and disciple (*shitei sōtai*). The fundamental source of our faith and practice is to follow the will of the master as our own, to serve the master, and to propagate his teachings.

Nichiren Daishonin placed absolute trust in Nikko Shonin who, as his disciple, thoroughly understood him; and Nikko Shonin absolutely revered Nichiren Daishonin as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. Thus, the condition of the oneness of master and disciple (*shitei ittai*) was upheld, and based on this, Nikko Shonin alone received the transmission of the Great Law. This is known as the transmission of the Lifeblood Heritage of the Law to a single person. It is the most essential tenet of Nichiren Shoshu, and it must be strictly protected under any condition.

In addition to Nikko Shonin, there were the five senior priests (*goroso*) who served Nichiren Daishonin. However, even though they were taught directly by the Daishonin, they lacked the faith and understanding to perceive Nichiren Daishonin as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. As a result, the five senior priests were confused about the principles of the Daishonin's Buddhism, and they also were confused and bewildered about the object of worship. This led them to enshrine and worship a statue of Shakyamuni.

In response, Nikko Shonin stated the following in the *Instructions for Believers of the Fuji School* (Fuji isseki montō zonji no koto):

The teachings established by the Daishonin do not promote any paintings or wooden statues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas as the object of worship. Based on the will expressed in his writings, the object of worship is none other than the five characters of Myōhō-Renge-Kyō. Indeed, it is the Gohonzon inscribed in his own hand.

(*Gosho*, p. 1871)

Thus, Nikko Shonin denounced the errors of the five senior priests. In addition to being confused, the five senior priests belittled the Goshos that were handwritten by Nichiren Daishonin. They ignored formalities of the practices of Gongyō and Shōdai established by Nichiren Daishonin, and they concentrated on the recitation and copying of a part of the Lotus Sutra. Moreover, they shunned the practice of shakubuku, which is appropriate for the Latter Day of the Law.

In Nichiren Shoshu, from the time of the passing of Nichiren Daishonin some 730 years ago to this day, the Gohonzon—the fundamental source of the great benefit for all mankind to attain enlightenment in one's present form—and the

entirety of the teachings have remained absolutely unchanged. The truth of Nichiren Daishonin's doctrine has been preserved. We always must remember that this has been possible only because of the transmission of the Lifeblood Heritage of the Law, entrusted to a single person. The Daishonin states:

The order of the Heritage of the Law: from Nichiren to Nikko.

(*Gosho*, p. 1675)

Furthermore, in the *Reply to Hara* (Hara dono gohenji), Nikko Shonin stated:

All the disciples turned their backs on the master. I, Nikko, alone understood the correct principles of our true master. Realizing and embracing the virtues of achieving the true purpose [of the Daishonin's advent], I, Nikko, never lost sight of his fundamental will.

(*Seiten*, p. 557)

Nikko Shonin demonstrated an uncompromising determination and unshakeable faith, based on the principle of the relationship between master and disciple. He took firm leadership of this sect and took actions to protect true Buddhism. This marks the essential heritage of Nichiren Shoshu. The same spirit has continued to exist solidly in the successive High Priests, who have taught and transmitted true Buddhism throughout the ages, all the way to our current High Priest Nichinyo Shonin.

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in *The Outline of the Buddha's Sacred Teachings Taught throughout his Life* (Ichidai shōgyō tai'i):

The Lotus Sutra cannot be understood without the transmission of the Heritage of the Law.

(*Gosho*, p. 92)

It is absolutely impossible to learn and master true Buddhism through the accumulation of academic knowledge alone, regardless of how many hundreds of Buddhist texts we may read. We must revere, believe in, and seek out the true Buddhism of the Lifeblood Heritage of the Law, which solemnly and continuously flows at Head Temple Taisekiji, where the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching is enshrined. Furthermore, we must exert our utmost efforts in faith and practice, following the guidance of our High Priest, who has received the transmission of Heritage of the Law. By so doing, the heritage of faith will continuously flow within our lives, activating our Buddha nature. Then, our negative karma from our past lives can be expiated, and our bodies as well as our daily lives will manifest the tremendous benefits of the Gohonzon, and we will achieve the great effect of the attainment of enlightenment in one's present form (*sokushin jōbutsu*).

Following the directions of the High Priest, who has received the transmission of the Lifeblood Heritage of the Law, is fundamentally different from the relationships between seniors and juniors or superiors and inferiors that we generally see in society. We must not confuse these and talk about them as though they are the same. This is because, in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, with regards to the three treasures of the Buddha, the Law, and the priesthood, the High Priest represents the treasure of the priesthood.

The treasure of the priesthood in Nichiren Shoshu is represented by Nikko Shonin—the first of the treasure of the priesthood—who received and transmitted the entirety of true Buddhism from Nichiren Daishonin—and all the successive High Priests, who have received the transmission of Heritage of the Law entrusted to a single person. Precisely because the High Priest is the treasure of the priesthood, he is able to transcribe the internal enlightenment of the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching and bestow it upon us in the form of the Gohonzon. When we do Gongyo and chant Daimoku to this Gohonzon, we are able to expiate our negative karma and receive benefits.

The Daishonin states the following in *One Hundred and Six Articles* (Hyaku rokka-shō):

You must uphold Nikko, the direct successor of the Law, as the comprehensive leader, as you upheld me while I was alive.

(*Gosho*, p. 1702)

This absolute reverence for the Heritage of the Law entrusted to a single person has been the proud tradition held by the priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu for more than seven hundred years. It is the unchanging tenet of Nichiren Shoshu.

The Honorable Retired High Priest Nikken Shonin stated the following in his New Year's Address for this year:

Indeed, the transmission of the Heritage of true Buddhism from master to disciple—and not argumentative reasoning or theories—is the essential core for the achievement of the ultimate propagation of the true Law for ten thousand years and all eternity.

(*Daibyakuho*, No. 900, p. 2)

Furthermore, High Priest Nichinyo Shonin said the following in his New Year's Address:

When we look into the distance, toward the achievement of kosen-rufu in the future, the establishment of the goal to increase the Hokkeko membership to 800,000 marks for us a matter of utmost importance and a

fundamental objective that we must achieve without fail, regardless of the myriad hardships that we may encounter and the infinite challenges that we must fight off.

(*Dainichiren*, No. 827, p. 4)

Now is the time for us to focus, stand tall, and fulfill these directions, as we uphold faith and practice based on the relationship between master and disciple.

Nikko Shonin gave the following instructions for us, the priests and lay believers in the Latter Day of the Law:

Until kosen-rufu is achieved, propagate the Law to the full extent of your ability without begrudging your life.

(*Gosho*, p. 1884)

The chief priests who have been sent throughout Japan and the world as representatives of the High Priest and the Hokkeko believers in their respective regions must form a solid unity of many in body one in mind (*itai dōshin*), chant Daimoku for oneself and others, and do shakubuku, so that we can attain our designated goal of establishing a membership of 800,000 Hokkeko believers by the year 2021, the 800th anniversary of the advent of the founder, Nichiren Daishonin. This is the practice that is appropriate for the current times, based on upholding faith in the transmission of the Heritage of the Law. Let us advance and propagate true Buddhism with courage and joy, for the sake of the attainment of enlightenment for ourselves and for others, and the establishment of the Buddha land.