

Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin
May 2015, Oko Lecture

The Two Principles of the General and Specific (*So-betsu no nigi*)

This month, we will focus on the following passage from *Reply to Soya* (Soya dono-gohenji), in order to deepen our understanding of the two principles of the general and specific ways of interpretation (*sōbetsu no nigi*):

Having received the water of wisdom [of the mystic Law] from the Tathagata Shakyamuni, Bodhisattva Jōgyō shall spread it to the lifeless and depressed living beings of the evil world of the Latter Day of the Law. This is the meaning of wisdom. It is entrusted from the revered Shakyamuni to Bodhisattva Jōgyō. However, it is Nichiren who is propagating this doctrine in the nation of Japan. In Buddhism, there are both general and specific ways of interpretation. If such ways of interpretation are confused even in the slightest, one can never attain Buddhahood. Rather, it will be the cause for one to endlessly transmigrate the six paths.

(*Gosho*, p. 1039)

It is said that this *Gosho* was written in Minobu during the second year of Kenji (1276), when Nichiren Daishonin was 55 years old. It is a letter written to Soya Kyoshin, who lived in the province of Shimousa (present-day Ichikawa City in Chiba Prefecture).

This writing contains important teachings concerning the attainment of Buddhahood, such as the two aspects of reality and wisdom (*kyōchi*) and the two principles of the general and the specific (*sōbetsu no nigi*). Because of these contents, the *Gosho* also is known by the title, *The Crucial Elements for Attaining Enlightenment* (Jōbutsu yōjin-shō).

In the above passage, the Daishonin expounds the two principles of the general and specific ways of interpretation. These signify the general transmission (*sōfuzoku*) and the specific transmission (*betsufuzoku*) of the Lotus Sutra. Here, the Daishonin explains the fundamentals of faith and practice in the relationship between master and disciple (*shitei sōtai*). Confusion about these fundamentals will result in arbitrary, skewed views that will cause us to grow distant from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. Far from being able to attain enlightenment, we will fall into a life condition of confusion and delusion, and remain in the condition of transmigrating the six paths (*rokudō rin'ne*).

Thus, it is essential for our faith in the Dai-Gohonzon to firmly understand the two principles of the general and the specific. With these, we will be able to gain

the state of happiness through benefit of attainment of Buddhahood in this Lifetime without changing one's present form.

The word “general” (*sō*) means “comprehensive” or “all-embracing,” and the term “specific” (*betsu*) means to “distinguish” or “separate.” Transmission refers to the provision of instructions about Buddhism from the master to the disciple and his entrustment of the propagation of the teachings to his disciple. Thus, the general and specific transmission refers to the general transmission, in which the Buddha teaches the Lotus Sutra to the entirety of his disciples and followers and entrusts them with its propagation; and the specific transmission, in which the Buddha expounds the essence of the Lotus Sutra to a specific disciple and entrusts him with its propagation. Buddhism is able to spread among the people through the general and specific transmission.

In order to ensure the propagation of the Lotus Sutra after his death, Shakyamuni transmitted the teaching in the general and specific ways.

In terms of the general transmission, he stated the following in the Entrustment (*Zokurui*; twenty-second) chapter of the Lotus Sutra:

Now I entrust it to you. You must single-mindedly propagate this Law abroad, causing its benefits to spread far and wide.

(*Hokekyo*, p. 518; *Lotus Sutra*, Watson, p. 277)

Shakyamuni expounded the Lotus Sutra to his disciples and followers. Then, he transmitted the teachings to them and entrusted them with the propagation of the Lotus Sutra after his passing. The purpose of this transmission was for the propagation of the teachings following Shakyamuni's demise, for the 2000 years of the Former and Middle Days of the Law.

The specific transmission refers to the entrustment of the propagation of the mystic Law (*Myōhō*) during the Latter Day of the Law—which also is known as “a time of conflict, when the pure Law will become obscured and lost.” The Latter Day of the Law is the time when Shakyamuni's Buddhism loses all of its power.

The Goshō passage we are studying today begins as follows:

Having received the water of wisdom [of the mystic Law] from the Tathagata Shakyamuni, Bodhisattva Jōgyō shall spread it to the lifeless and depressed living beings of the evil world of the Latter Day of the Law. This is the meaning of wisdom. It is entrusted from the revered Shakyamuni to Bodhisattva Jōgyō.

(*Goshō*, p. 1039)

This explains the specific transmission.

In the Wondrous Powers of the Tathagata (*Jinriki*; twenty-first) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni transmitted the essential core of the Lotus Sutra specifically to Bodhisattva Jōgyō, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and he entrusted him with the propagation of the mystic Law (*Myōhō*) and the

salvation of all mankind in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law. The Daishonin indicates the significance of this specific transmission by stating, “It is entrusted from the revered Shakyamuni to Bodhisattva Jōgyō.” The specific transmission also is known as the transmission of the essence of the Lotus Sutra (*ketchō fuzoku*).

Nichiren Daishonin wrote the following in the Gosho, *On the Three Great Secret Laws* (Sandai hihō shō):

Two-thousand years ago, with absolute certainty, I, Nichiren, as the leader of the bodhisattva of the earth, received the Three Great Secret Laws from the great teacher, the World-Honored One of Unsurpassed Enlightenment (*Daikaku seson*).

(*Gosho*, p. 1595)

Here, the Daishonin explains that the essential core of the Lotus Sutra, which was transmitted from Shakyamuni to Bodhisattva Jōgyō, is the Three Great Secret Laws—the True Object of Worship of the Essential Teaching, the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, and the Daimoku of the Essential Teaching. Moreover, Nichiren Daishonin implies that he is the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Jōgyō and that, in fact, he made his advent as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

In the passage we are studying today from *Reply to Soya* (Soya dono gohenji), the Daishonin states:

However, it is Nichiren who is propagating this doctrine in the nation of Japan. In Buddhism, there are both general and specific ways of interpretation.

(*Gosho*, p. 1039)

This means that the True Buddha Nichiren Daishonin, based on the transmission of the two principles of the general and specific, will propagate Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō of the Three Great Secret Laws to all mankind in the Latter Day of the Law. This is the great Law of the true cause of the Buddhism of the sowing.

The following is written in the *Document for Entrusting the Law that Nichiren Propagated throughout His Life* (Nichiren ichigo guhō fuzoku sho):

I, Nichiren, transfer the entirety of the Law that I have propagated throughout my life to Byakuren Ajari Nikko, and designate him the Great Master of Propagation of the Essential Teaching.

(*Gosho*, p. 1675)

Nichiren Daishonin will lead all the people in the Latter Day of the Law to enlightenment. At the same time, in order to ensure the achievement of his great objective of kosen-rufu after his passing, he specifically selected Nikko Shonin from among his numerous disciples and entrusted him with the Dai-Gohonzon of

the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, which inherently contains the Three Great Secret Laws. Furthermore, he entrusted the entirety of true Buddhism to him. This is also known as the transmission of the Heritage of the Law to a single person (*yuiju ichinin no kechimyaku sōjō*).

In the *One Hundred and Six Articles* (Hyakurokka shō), Nichiren Daishonin states the following about the transmission of the Heritage of the Law entrusted to a single person:

Just as you have followed me during my days, you must eternally revere each of the successive High Priests as the head of the priesthood and the one who inherits the true Law, which has been passed down from Nikko.

(*Gosho*, p. 1702)

This signifies the fundamental Lifeblood Heritage of the entirety of true Buddhism, which has been transmitted specifically from Nichiren Daishonin to Nikko Shonin, to Nichimoku Shonin, to Nichido Shonin, and to all the successive High Priests throughout the ages.

The direct path to the attainment of enlightenment, is established through following our successive High Priests and by devoting ourselves to the practice, based on the relationship between master and disciple.

Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, we must exert our utmost efforts in our faith and practice with a clear understanding of the two principles of the general and the specific.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin states:

Of the two principles of the general and the specific...the specific refers to the transmission from the Daishonin to Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin. In other words, it is premised on believing in and following the transmission of the Lifeblood Heritage of the Law entrusted to a single person. The general is none other than the lifeblood heritage of faith, which flows in our absolute and undivided faith in the Gohonzon of Nichiren Shoshu. Furthermore, the Daishonin states that those who turn their backs on the two principles of the general and specific will find that “one is not able to attain Buddhahood.”

(*Dainichiren*, No. 798, p. 51)

Thus, the High Priest instructs us to uphold our faith in and follow the Heritage of the Law entrusted to a single person, and to sincerely embrace the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching—the Three Great Secret Laws. By so doing, we can ensure the flow of the lifeblood heritage of faith.

As Nichiren Shoshu priests and lay believers, let us be mindful of the two principles of the general and specific and sincerely believe in the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, the very entity of the life of Nichiren Daishonin. Furthermore, let us follow the guidance of our High Priest Nichinyo Shonin in our Buddhist practice for ourselves and for others, as we

proceed toward our goal of establishing a membership of 800,000 Hokkeko believers and achieving the great objective of kosen-rufu, the will of Nichiren Daishonin. Let us advance by chanting sincere Daimoku and doing powerful shakubuku.