

Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin
October 2012, Oko Lecture

“A Bird that Approaches Mount Sumeru Turns to Gold”

“A bird that approaches Mount Sumeru turns to gold,” is an extremely famous passage. It is from the Gosho, “Offerings to the Object of Worship” (*“Honzon kuyō-gosho”*):

The tree that grows into the pristine spring water creates lapis lazuli. The water that flows into the great ocean becomes salty. A bird that approaches Mount Sumeru will turn to gold. And the *agada* medicine renders poison into medicine. The same is true for the mystery of the Lotus Sutra. It turns common mortals into Buddhas.

(*Gosho*, p. 1054)

The Gosho, “Reply to Myōhō-ama” (*“Myōhō-ama gozen gohenji”*), contains a similar passage:

Face powder can change the color of black lacquer to white, just like snow. When living beings approach Mount Sumeru, they assume a golden hue. Those who embrace the title of the Lotus Sutra will expiate the negative karma that they have accumulated in this lifetime and since the remotest past—transforming negative karma into the great merit of positive karma—from pitch-black lacquer to white. Certainly, all the positive causes from time without beginning will turn to gold.

(*Gosho*, p. 1483)

Another Gosho, “On Refuting Ryōkan and Others” (*“Ha Ryōkan tō-gosho”*), states:

All birds approaching Mount Sumeru will turn into the same color.

(*Gosho*, p. 1075)

Still another reference is contained in the Gosho, “The Treasure of a Filial Child” (*“Sennichi ama gohenji”*):

All birds approaching Mount Sumeru will take on the same color.

(*Gosho*, p. 1475)

All these passages explain how birds that approach Mount Sumeru will turn into gold or into the same color.

According to the Buddhist worldview, Mount Sumeru is the highest peak in the realm and stands at the center of the world. It is expounded that four lands, known as the four continents of Sumeru (*shumi shishu*), respectively lie to its north, south, east, and west. Of these, the continent to the south, known as the southern Jambudvīpa, is the world where we reside. The huge, tall mountain called Mount Sumeru is located in the center of this world. Due to its extreme height, it is naturally covered with snow year-round. Moreover, this mountain receives the most light from the sun. The bright rays of the sun and the brilliant whiteness of the snow work together to cause all birds that approach the mountain—be they crows, peacocks, or other birds of any color—to turn into a bright golden color.

Certainly, all of you may have witnessed how, at dusk on clear autumn or winter days when the evening sun is setting in the western sky, everything in the entire world—including the clouds and the flocks of birds in the sky—is enveloped in a bright golden or orange hue. The scenery of Mount Sumeru is exponentially more grand and majestic than this.

What, then, is the significance of these passages? These passages have twofold meanings ; first, they indicate that, in contrast to various other teachings, the Lotus Sutra possesses immeasurable benefits and good causes. For example, it teaches us of the benefits in which even people steeped in the three evil paths of hell, hunger, and animality and those who have amassed tremendous negative karma can be led to enlightenment and salvation.

Secondly, Mount Sumeru represents the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, the very entity of our master Nichiren Daishonin, who is the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. It is the life condition of the Buddha. It signifies how our lives, in our present form, can be transformed into the precious life condition of the Buddha, without ever having to eliminate our earthly desires, if we believe in the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching and chant Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō.

These passages further signify that, even if the three obstacles and four devils vie with one another to obstruct our progress and even if hardships and evil hindrances occur to impede our efforts, we are able to change each and every such impediment and transform every calamity into joy. This is what Nichiren Daishonin means when he states that “a bird that approaches Mount Sumeru turns to gold.”

In the Gosho, “The Essence of the *Yakuo* Chapter” (“*Yakuo-bon tokui-sho*”), the Daishonin wrote:

Mount Sumeru is colored bright golden. Without fail, all oxen and horses; humans and heavenly beings; all flocks of birds and other beings will lose their intrinsic color and take on a golden hue when they approach this mountain. Such is not the case with any other mountain.

(*Gosho*, p. 349)

In the Bodhisattva Medicine King (*Yakuō bosatsu*; twenty-third) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha presents a comparison of the Lotus Sutra with the pre-Lotus Sutra and provisional teachings. He reveals the superiority of the Lotus Sutra by setting forth ten comparisons.

For example, all the rivers of the world—from the smallest streams to the largest waterways—ultimately flow into the ocean. When the river water enters the great ocean, it mysteriously transforms into the same consistency and has the same salty taste. The comparison between the vast ocean and all the world’s rivers is used as a reference to demonstrate the superiority of the Lotus Sutra over all other sutras.

Furthermore, the Lotus Sutra is comparable to Mount Sumeru, and the pre-Lotus Sutra and provisional teachings are likened to small hills. Thus, he expounds the superiority of the Lotus Sutra. In “The Essence of the *Yakuo* Chapter,” the Daishonin explains that Mount Sumeru is able to transform not only the birds but also the humans, the animals, and all other living beings into the brilliantly golden entities of the Buddha, whether or not they themselves are aware of it. Furthermore, the Daishonin expounds that negative karma will be transformed into positive karma; earthly desires into enlightenment; and life and death into nirvana.

In his *Exegesis on “The Meaning of the True Entity of Myoho-Renge-Kyo”* (“Tōtaigi-shō” mondan), Nichikan Shonin wrote:

Question: What is the significance of the word “transformation”? Answer: “Transformation” refers to a condition in which one does not alter his entity—a condition in which he does not change his appearance. Such is the meaning of transformation. This is what is meant by the passage in the *Treatise on the Great Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom* (Dai chido-ron), which states, “poison turns to medicine.” Furthermore, in the 38th item of this volume, the Gosho, “*Offerings to the Object of Worship*” contains the following excerpt: “A sovereign named King Konzoku (King Golden Millet) turned sand into gold. Mahanama caused rocks to turn into gems. Accordingly, a bird that approaches Mount Sumeru will turn into gold. And the *agada* medicine renders poison into medicine. The same is true for

the mystery of the Lotus Sutra. It turns common mortals into Buddhas.”
This is what is meant [by transformation].

(*Gosho mondan*, p. 622)

Thus, Nichikan Shonin explains that the significance of the phrase, “A bird that approaches Mt. Sumeru turns to gold,” is that a transformation—and not a displacing change—takes place.

When people believe in the Gohonzon and chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, regardless of who they are, they will receive benefits from the Gohonzon, as their lives are wonderfully polished and improved, and as they manifest the life condition of the Buddha. They also will manifest brilliant refinement and appearance in their lives, based on their faith. The various birds encounter the bright light of Mount Sumeru and take on a brilliant golden color. They become one with the brilliance. In the same way, we also can transform our earthly desires into the life condition of the Buddha, when we embrace and practice to the Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws.

Where, specifically, is Mount Sumeru? Indeed, it is none other than the Head Temple Taisekiji, where the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching—the very entity of Nichiren Daishonin—is enshrined. Therefore, going on a tozan pilgrimage to the Head Temple is to approach Mount Sumeru. Our High Priest Nichinyo Shonin stated:

The Daishonin wrote the following in the Gosho, “Reply to Lord Nanjo” (*“Nanjō dono-gohenji”*):

Those who travel to this place to pay their respects will instantly eradicate the negative karma they have accumulated since the remote past and transform their sins of the three categories of action into the three virtues.

(*Gosho*, p. 1569; *GND-1*, p. 83)

... In other words, this passage means that the benefits of making tozan pilgrimages to the Head Temple to worship the Dai-Gohonzon, which is enshrined here, is extremely vast, and each individual will be able to expiate all his sins from the infinite past of time with no beginning. Furthermore, he will be able to transform all his delusions and illusions of the three categories of action into the three virtues.

(*Collection of the High Priest's Directions [Goshinan shū]*, vol. 8, p. 30)

Thus, our High Priest instructs us on the benefits and significance of going on tozan pilgrimages. It is not an easy feat to go on tozan pilgrimages from overseas locations. However, as we exert our utmost efforts to achieve pure faith and strive to establish a life condition that will enable us to go on tozan to the Head Temple, let us all etch into our hearts the following golden words from the Gosho, “On the True Cause” (*Honnin myō-shō*):

You must uphold strong faith and single-mindedly chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. By so doing, your entity as a common mortal will immediately transform into a Buddha. This is the natural process of clear singular enlightenment (*tenshin dokurō*) known as enlightenment in one’s present form (*sokushin jōbutsu*).

(*Gosho*, p. 1679)