

**Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin
November 2014, Oko Lecture**

The Protection of the Guardian Deities and Faith and Practice of Priesthood and Laity in Unity

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the Gosho, *Attaining Enlightenment at the Initial Stage of Faith through the Lotus Sutra* (Hokke shoshin jobutsu-shō):

When, with our mouths, we call upon the mystic Law (*Myōhō*), our Buddha nature also will be called forth and will emerge without fail. The Buddha nature of Bonten and Taishaku will be summoned to provide us protection. The Buddha nature of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas will be beckoned, and they will rejoice.

(*Gosho*, p. 1321)

This Gosho was written by Nichiren Daishonin in the first year of Kō'an (1278), when he was fifty-seven years of age and living in Minobu. It is believed to be addressed to Myōhō-ama, who lived in Okamiya, in the province of Suruga (present-day Numazu City in Shizuoka Prefecture). However, further details concerning this Gosho are unknown.

This writing uses a question-and-answer format and, as the title indicates, it addresses issues that are of concern to those who are aspiring to take faith in the Lotus Sutra for the first time.

The major topics presented in this writing include the fact that the Latter Day of the Law is the time for Bodhisattva Jōgyō to propagate Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyo, the essential core of the Lotus Sutra, to bring salvation to all people. It also addresses how even great calamities in the land can be eradicated with the coming together of an excellent master, an excellent believer, and the excellent Law. Furthermore, it teaches that as the propagation in the Latter Day of the Law, we must strongly teach and make people listen hear the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra, and sow the seed of Buddhism, regardless of whether or not they have faith. The Daishonin provides explanations on these and other issues in this Gosho.

In concluding this writing, the Daishonin teaches that the Buddha nature of all living beings in the ten worlds is Myōhō-Renge-Kyo. Since Myōhō-Renge-Kyo is intrinsically inherent in all human beings, chanting Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyo has the benefit of summoning the Buddha nature from within their lives. This then continues on to the passage on which we are focused this month.

Nichiren Daishonin expounds that chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo will manifest and activate our own Buddha nature within our lives. Furthermore, he explains that, since the Buddha nature is also inherent in the guardian deities, such as Bonten and Taishaku, who have sworn to protect the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, it is a matter of course that they will protect the votaries who embrace the mystic Law (*Myōhō*).

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin states the following about this passage:

The Daishonin explains that, when we chant the Daimoku, which contains the entirety of the Three Great Secret Laws, we will be able to reach to our Buddha nature. Our Buddha nature will be summoned from within us and it will be manifested without fail. Not only that, the Buddha natures of Bonten and Taishaku also will be summoned and they will function to protect us.... When we exert our efforts in the practice for ourselves and for others, the guardian deities will protect us, by taking on various forms and functions.... It is their duty to protect those who uphold the Gohonzon. The fundamental essence of all things lies in Myoho-Renge-Kyo. The function of guardian deities will appear is to protect those who believe in and practice this mystic Law (*Myōhō*). From this perspective, we offer the guardian deities the flavor of the Law during our morning Gongyō.

(*Daibyakuho*, No. 888)

As priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu, we must follow these directions and, with absolute conviction, uphold our practice for ourselves and for others. This is because the strength of the protection of the guardian deities is commensurate with and intensified by the strength of the faith and practice of the people. The Daishonin states the following in *Reply to Shijō Kingo* (Shijō kingo dono-gohenji):

“The greater one’s conviction, the stronger the protection of the guardian deities.” This shows that the protection of the gods depends on the strength of our faith.

(*Gosho*, p. 1292)

We truly must take this to heart.

In another passage in the *Gosho*, the Daishonin states:

An excellent master, an excellent believer, and the excellent Law—only when these three are united, can a practitioner have his prayers answered, and even disasters that may befall the land can be driven away.

(*Gosho*, p. 1314)

Indeed, the Daishonin explains that, when the three criteria of the Law of Myoho-Renge-Kyo, the priests who expound it, and the sincere believers who uphold it come together,

prayers will come true. In other words, this is proof that Myoho-Renge-Kyo is the true Law.

Furthermore, when there is true prayer, the principle called *kannō* [one will perceive the Buddha, the Gohonzon] will appear.

“*Kan*” refers to the fact that we, as humans, perceive the Buddha’s power and influence when we face the Gohonzon with strong faith, while “*nō*” represents the manifestation of the power of the Buddha (the Gohonzon) in response to our single-minded determination in our prayers to seek the Buddha. We actually are able to perceive the power—the power of benefits of the Gohonzon. When common mortals established this connection between the Gohonzon, it is called as “the mutuality of the common mortal perceiving the Buddha and the Buddha’s compassionate response” (*kannō dokō*). When we pray sincerely and continue to perform Gongyō and chant Daimoku, the principle of the “the mutuality of the common mortal perceiving the Buddha and the Buddha’s compassionate response” will be activated without fail. Thus, we must believe in the Buddha’s will as we face the Gohonzon.

Nichiko Shonin, the Fifty-ninth High Priest of the Head Temple, provided concrete directions on how we should chant Daimoku:

Your body should not manifest carelessness or laziness. And your mind should not contain distractions or idle thoughts. The words that resound through your mouth should not be too fast or slurred. Your voice should maintain a medium tone; it should be calm and firm and the words should be clearly enunciated.... Your body should be upright and your fingers and palms should be placed together in prayer....Your eyes should focus straight on the Gohonzon. And your entire body should be full of joy and high spirits.

(*Nichiren Shoshu kōyō*, p. 134, summarized)

The direction of “your body should not manifest carelessness or laziness” means that we must sit with a correct, straight posture before the Gohonzon. It is important to be mindful that, even on days when we are tired, we must not sit sluggishly or in a slovenly manner and we must never skip doing Gongyō. The words should not be recited too fast or in a peculiar way. We must maintain a calm demeanor and chant sonorously. We should clearly enunciate each Daimoku and firmly pronounce the end of each word, maintaining a medium pitch. It is also important for us to have good posture and keep our backs straight. Our palms and fingers should be placed together at our chests. We should directly face the Gohonzon with reverence. Based on these directions, let’s make certain that our entire attitude, when we chant Daimoku, shows that we are full of joy and happiness.

Nichiren Daishonin explains the following about our prayers to the Gohonzon in *Reply to Shijō Kingo* (Shijo Kingo dono gohenji):

If a disciple and his master pray with differing thoughts, their actions are as pointless as lighting a fire on water. Even if the disciple and master are of the same mind, if they have slandered the great Law by long embracing inferior doctrines, then their prayers will not come true. Therefore, his life and that of his master both will be ruined.

(*Gosho*, p. 1118)

The relationship between master and disciple, and the truth or heresy and superiority or inferiority of the Buddhist doctrine are significant for any prayers to come true.

As priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu, we must follow the directions of High Priest Nichinyo Shonin and form a solid unity between priesthood and laity, based on the sprit of many in body, one in mind (*itai doshin*) and advance with devotion to achieve our supreme goal of kosen-rufu.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin stated the following:

Kosen-rufu signifies the solid unity between priesthood and lay believers. It can be achieved only after there is unity between the priesthood and laity. The priests alone cannot achieve it, and the lay believers alone also cannot achieve it. Kosen-rufu only can be accomplished when the priesthood and laity unite together as one.

(*Dainichiren*, No. 724, p. 92)

The Commemorative Ceremony Celebrating the 770th Anniversary of the Birth of Second High Priest Nikko Shonin and the General Meeting Celebrating the Achievement of Increasing the Hokkeko Membership by 50 percent are now truly imminent as we approach next year. As Nichiren Shoshu priests and lay believers, we must form a solid unity between the “excellent masters” and “excellent believers” to accomplish the objectives set forth by High Priest Nichinyo Shonin. Regardless of what difficulties and hardships we may encounter, let us firmly etch into our hearts that the guardian deities will provide us strong protection. Let us exert our best efforts to chant sincere Daimoku and use the power of the benefits that we receive to advance with ever more devotion to do shakubuku.