

Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin
December 2014, Oko Lecture

Practice of Chanting Daimoku For Oneself and for Others

In the Gosho, *Questions and Answers on Embracing the Lotus Sutra* (Jimyō hokke mondō-shō), Nichiren Daishonin states:

Single-mindedly chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and encourage others to do the same. This will remain as your only memory from this present, human life.

(*Gosho*, p. 300)

This Gosho was written by Nichiren Daishonin in the third month of the third year of Kōchō (1263), when he was 42 years of age. He had just been pardoned from his exile to Izu and had returned to Kamakura.

As the title suggests, by quoting numerous passages of documentary proof, the Daishonin explains in the Gosho that the Lotus Sutra is supreme teaching among all other sutras and there is no means other than the Lotus Sutra that will enable people in the Latter Day of the Law to attain enlightenment. Using question-and-answer format, he teaches that we must single-mindedly chant Daimoku and practice for others to lead them to attain enlightenment as well.

Nichiren Daishonin was convinced that the cause for the repeated disasters at the time was none other than the existence of heretical sects that turned their backs on the correct teachings of true Buddhism. Thus, on the 16th day of the seventh month of the first year of Bunnō (1260), he submitted the *Risshō ankoku-ron* (On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism) to the feudal authorities. He harshly denounced the heretical sects—especially the Jōdo sect. As a result, all the powerful officials of the feudal government were infuriated. Furthermore, the Nembutsu believers and the monks of the other sects all turned their hatred toward Nichiren Daishonin. With the powerful backing of Hōjō Shigetoki, they attacked the Daishonin's dwelling in Matsubagayatsu. This incident is known as the Matsubagayatsu Persecution.

Following this persecution, Nichiren Daishonin temporarily sought refuge in Toki Jonin's mansion in Wakamiya in Kazusa Province (present-day Ichikawa City, Chiba Prefecture). He used this location as a base from which to promote his

propagation activities. Then, in the spring of the following year, the first year of Kōchō (1261), he once again returned to Kamakura.

When the feudal authorities got wind of Nichiren Daishonin's return, they immediately arrested him and exiled him to Itō on the Izu Peninsula. In the *Letter to Shimoyama* (Shimoyama goshōsoku), the Daishonin states:

Saying that it is strange for Nichiren to be alive, they have exiled me to the province of Izu.

(*Gosho*, p. 1150)

The authorities gave a truly ridiculous reason for sentencing Nichiren Daishonin to exile, saying that it was strange, indeed, that he was still alive after the intense attack. The charges were completely false, concocted by the father and son pair—Hōjō Shigetoki and the regent Nagatoki. The Daishonin later described these circumstances in the following way:

It is outrageous that they exiled me to the province of Izu. Note that Lord Gokurakuji [Shigetoki], Nagatoki, and their clan will be each brought to ruin.

(*Gosho*, p. 1263)

As indicated by the Daishonin, Gokurakuji Shigetoki fell ill and subsequently died in a state of mental illness.

Hōjō Tokiyori, former regent to the shogunate, was deeply shocked by Shigetoki's death. Furthermore, realizing that he had punished Nichiren Daishonin, an innocent man, Tokiyori released him from exile on the 22nd day of the second month of the third year of Kōchō (1263). Thus, after a year and nine months, Nichiren Daishonin was able to return to his dwelling in Kamakura.

The writing, *Questions and Answers on Embracing the Lotus Sutra* (Jimyō hokke mondō-shō), on which we read at the beginning, is the Gosho that the Daishonin wrote following his release.

This Gosho consists of five question-and-answer passages. In the first question-and-answer section, Nichiren Daishonin indicates that among entire lifetime teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha, the Lotus Sutra is supreme and is the direct path to attaining Buddhahood in one's present form (*sokushin jobutsu*).

In the second question-and-answer exchange, he explains that the superiority of the Lotus Sutra is fundamentally based on the scriptures—that is, on the word of the Buddha.

In the third exchange, the Daishonin references the commentaries of the Great Teachers Miaole and Tiantai and indicates that the path to true enlightenment was first revealed in the Lotus Sutra.

In the fourth question-and-answer segment, the Daishonin instructs us that the Lotus Sutra is precisely the reason that those in the status of the two vehicles, who had heretofore been denied the attainment of Buddhahood in the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings, were now able to achieve it. He also states that, in order to attain enlightenment, we must defeat arrogance, discard anger, and uphold the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra.

In the fifth and final exchange, the Daishonin explains that we have been born as humans, which is truly difficult to achieve, and we have found true Buddhism, which is a rare encounter. He also teaches us to take faith in Myoho-Renge-Kyo, the true purpose of the advent of all Buddhas, and the teaching of the one vehicle for the attainment of enlightenment of all living beings.

Then, the Daishonin describes the fears of slander, the preciousness of the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, and other matters. He concludes this Goshō by teaching us not to be controlled by fame and fortune. The Daishonin states that when we chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo for ourselves and encourage others to do the same, we will be able to establish a most superior life.

Through this Goshō, Nichiren Daishonin teaches that the Lotus Sutra is the one and only supreme Law by which all mankind can instantly attain enlightenment. In the Latter Day of the Law, the Lotus Sutra indicates the Gohonzon, which possesses the Three Great Secret Laws. The Daishonin declares that embracing the Gohonzon is the direct path to Buddhahood.

The Daishonin warns us that those who turn their backs on the Lotus Sutra and those who belittle, detest, envy, and defame the people who believe in and propagate it will incur the torment of Avichi hell—the hell of incessant suffering. He explains the reason for this in the following passage:

Since the Law that one embraces is supreme, the person who upholds it also must be supreme. Thus, as a matter of course, if someone disparages and destroys such a person, he does the same toward the Law.

(*Goshō*, p. 298)

Here, the Daishonin states that, when a person embraces the supreme Law, he also is supreme. Therefore, if someone hates or slanders the person who embraces the Law, it means that he also is hating and slandering the Law.

At the conclusion of *Questions and Answers on Embracing the Lotus Sutra* (Jimyō hokke mondō-shō), Nichiren Daishonin presents the following directions:

Single-mindedly chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and encourage others to do the same. This will remain as your only memory from this present, human life.

(*Goshō*, p. 300)

Here, “single-mindedly chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo” refers to the practice for oneself (*jigyō*), and “encourage others to do the same” indicates the practice for others (*keta*), or shakubuku. The Daishonin teaches us that our devoting our lives to the Buddhist practice for ourselves and for others, is the foremost and supreme faith and practice in the Latter Day of the Law.

Nichikan Shonin stated in *Exegesis on the True Object of Worship* (Kanjin no honzon-shō mondan):

When there is an abundance of the practice for oneself, the practice for others also will arise without fail. The practice for others is none other than compassion.

(*Gosho mondan*, p. 219)

The actual practice of chanting Daimoku, full of benefits, will be manifested, without fail, as the actual practice of shakubuku, full of compassion.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin states:

It is not easy to persist in protecting the Gohonzon with reverence and to continue to uphold faith without any interruptions. However, the most essential key for us to be able to attain enlightenment is to perform morning and evening Gongyo every day and to maintain our faith practicing for ourselves and for others.

(*Dainichiren*, August 2012, p. 65)

Furthermore, he presents us with the following guidance:

Any person can accomplish shakubuku if he seriously puts his mind to it. There is no need to say anything difficult. We must have a firm conviction that “there is no means other than the Gohonzon to be able to achieve happiness.” Then, it is most important for us to sincerely and compassionately relay that conviction to others.

(*Dainichiren*, September 2012, p. 50)

Let us strive forth in our practice and develop the conviction in our hearts that our duty as priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu is to uphold the practice for ourselves and for others. This is the path that leads to true benefits. With taking it into our heart, we must put it into actual action.

There are many things in life that entice us and entertain us. If we focus on these distractions and our daily lives are swept away by such enticements, we ultimately will waste our lives and live in vain. A profound karmic bond with the Buddha has enabled us to be born into this world and we possess the good fortune to be able to practice the teachings of Nichiren Shoshu, which is most difficult to encounter.

Thus, it is important that we must propagate the precious teachings of Nichiren Daishonin widely and create the most supreme memories of our lives.

The auspicious occasion of the 770th anniversary of the birth of Second High Priest Nikko Shonin is almost upon us. Let us advance with devotion and further accomplish shakubuku, based on sincere Daimoku, so that we all can stand tall and be full of joy as we attend the commemorative ceremonies.