

Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin  
January 2015, Oko Lecture

## The Significance of the Unity Between the Priesthood and Laity

I wish you a happy New Year! I extend my heartfelt congratulations to you in this new year of 2015, “The Year of Kick-off Toward 2021 through the Achievement of the 2015 Objective.” This year, we finally will celebrate the grand occasion of the 770th anniversary of the birth of Nikko Shonin. The three practical points for this year are:

1. To dedicate oneself to the promotion of conducting shakubuku based on consistent Gongyō and Daimoku;
2. To participate in the Oko Ceremony together by encouraging each other; and
3. To cultivate one’s faith and nurture capable leaders through participating in a tozan pilgrimage.

Based on these points of action, let us advance together with devotion, so that we can promote the securing of the peace of the land through the propagation of true Buddhism (*risshō ankoku*) in our respective countries and regions.

The topic of this month’s Oko Lecture is “The Significance of the Unity Between the Priesthood and Laity.”

The unity between the priesthood and laity is created when the priests and the lay believers are well-aware of their respective positions and revere and cooperate with each other. The Nirvana Sutra (*Nehan gyō*) states:

Let it be known that, if all [priestly] disciples possess an understanding of the truly profound principles and if many lay believers with strong faith respect and revere Buddhism, even after the Buddha enters into nirvana, Buddhism will remain in the world for eternity.

(*Taisho*, 12 – 473a)

This condition is necessary for the perpetuation of Buddhism. Furthermore, it is not an exaggeration to say that, in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, the propagation of the Law by the priests and lay believers, in solid unity, led to the inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon, which is the fundamental essence of our faith.

As you know, the event that prompted the inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon was the Atsuhara Persecution. Of all the persecutions encountered by Nichiren Daishonin during his lifetime, this one was intrinsically different from the others. The persecutions that Nichiren Daishonin experienced up until his exile to Sado occurred so that he could live the predictions set forth in the twenty-line verse of the Encouraging Devotion (*Kanji*; thirteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. However, the Atsuhara Persecution occurred as a result of the propagation efforts of Nikko Shonin. This represents a huge difference between this and other persecutions. In other words, Nikko Shonin and the other disciples who possessed “an understanding of the truly profound principles” joined forces with Jinshirō, Yagorō, Yarokurō, Nanjo Tokimitsu and other “lay believers with strong faith” and risked their lives to thoroughly protect the correct doctrines of true Buddhism. When this incident occurred, Nichiren Daishonin stated:

It took Shakyamuni Buddha forty-odd years, the Great Teacher Tiantai thirty-odd years, and the Great Teacher Dengyō twenty-odd years to accomplish the purpose of their advent. The great and severe persecutions that befell them during those years are indescribable. I, Nichiren, already have discussed this matter with you. It has taken me twenty-seven years.

(*Gosho*, p. 1396)

The Daishonin explains that he had achieved the purpose of his advent into this world. He chose the 12th day of the tenth month and inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon.

Furthermore, Nikko Shonin wrote the following in his *Articles to be Observed After the Passing of Nikko* (Nikko ato jōjō no koto):

The Dai-Gohonzon of the second year of Kō'an (1279), which Nikko inherited [from Nichiren Daishonin], is hereby bequeathed to Nichimoku. It should be enshrined at Honmonji Temple.

(*Gosho*, p. 1883)

The Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching is none other than the entity of the Law that is transferred to only a single person. Twenty-sixth High Priest Nichikan Shonin wrote the following in his *Commentary on the Selection of the Time* (Senji-shō guki):

Question: What is the nature of the entity of the great Law hidden in the depths of the sutra?

Answer: In fact, it refers to the great Law that remained unpropagated by Tiantai; the foremost of the Three Great Secret Laws; and the Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching. Therefore, it is written in the *Gosho*, *On the Buddha's Prophecy* (Kenbutsu mirai ki) that “he will establish the true object of worship of the essential teaching based on the five

characters of Myoho-Renge-Kyo and thoroughly propagate it throughout the Jambudvipa world” [*Gosho*, p. 676]. Thus, this object of worship is the essential source of kosen-rufu.

(*Mondan*, p. 290)

Therefore, the achievement of kosen-rufu is impossible apart from the Dai-Gohonzon.

Recently, the Soka Gakkai modified its organizational by-laws and announced its decision to completely sever itself from the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary. This is a natural consequence to be reached by those who have destroyed the harmonious unity between the priesthood and laity, but it is still extremely pitiful, indeed. The objectives of securing a peaceful land through the propagation of true Buddhism (*risshō ankoku*) and attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime (*isshō jobutsu*) are impossible to accomplish away from the essential source. Since the end of 1990, the Soka Gakkai clearly revealed its tremendously slanderous intention to destroy the three treasures. It refused to heed the repeated admonishments from Nichiren Shoshu, and in November of the next year, it was excommunicated and has remained so to this day. This was caused by the arrogance of Daisaku Ikeda and the Gakkai executive leaders.

In the *Gosho*, *Letter to Ni'ike* (Ni'ike gosho) Nichiren Daishonin taught that arrogant people, such as these, would appear in the Latter Day of the Law:

The sutra expounds that, although the people in the Latter Day of the Law possess negligible knowledge of Buddhist doctrines, they show disdain for the priests, disregard the Law, and inevitably fall into the evil paths.

(*Gosho*, p. 1461)

In the Hokkeko of olden times in Japan, there was a notion “to serve the Buddhist robe and surplice of the priest.” This follows the attitude in faith expounded in the same *Gosho*:

To show that you truly understand the Law, you should respect the priest, revere the Law, and make Gokuyo offerings to the Buddha. Since [Shakyamuni] Buddha is not in our midst now, you must respect the person with the wisdom of enlightened understanding as the Buddha. How, then, can you not receive plentiful benefits? If you seek [happiness] in your future existences, you should discard [your attachments to] fame and fortune. Even if a priest is of humble stature, if he expounds the Lotus Sutra, you must revere him just as a living Buddha. This behavior indicates correctly follows the sutra.

(*ibid*)

Keeping this passage in our mind, we should follow the instruction of priests who have experienced Buddhist practice by following the guidance of Nichiren Daishonin and the successive High Priests.

Priests are common mortals like everyone else. Therefore, we do not worship individual priests or seek to find idealized leadership qualities in them. The notion is to revere and serve priests who wear the Buddhist robe and surplice and practice Buddhism. This attitude in faith was fostered by the lay believers in olden times. As a matter of course, the priests naturally must advance forth with devotion in a way that is appropriate for them as disciples of Nichiren Daishonin and the High Priest. However, there are many things that require a great deal of experience.

People who take faith, based on an organization that is premised on the fact that there are no priests, frequently do not even know how they should interact with priests. This is evident even in Japan. We must seek the Law and uphold the guidance based on the principles of true Buddhism. All priests have been appointed as the representatives of the High Priest. Therefore, it is important to uphold the guidance of those priests and proceed in our faith and practice.

Since the excommunication of the Soka Gakkai, Nichiren Shoshu temples and propagation centers have been established, one after another, in various countries around the world. The number of priests with permanent appointments has been increasing. However, it is also true that, because of varying conditions in different countries, there are some places where it is difficult to obtain permanent appointments for the priests or even establish a propagation center.

In order to attain the eternal perpetuation of the true Law (*ryōbō kujū*) and kosen-rufu amidst conditions like this, we must cultivate strong faith, seeking the essential source, continually perform our daily Gongyō and Shōdai and do shakubuku. The essential source is none other than the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching. We must continue to praise and yearn for the Dai-Gohonzon, and we must put forth our best efforts in our faith and practice by following our High Priest. By so doing, we will be able to open a path that will enable us to go on a tozan pilgrimage. Then, we should advance in our shakubuku efforts, based on the joy of having an audience with the Dai-Gohonzon.

Currently, throughout the world, numerous misfortunes have continued to occur, closely resembling the conditions described in the opening segment of the *Risshō ankoku-ron* (On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism). These all represent the toxic effects of slander, and the only way to resolve them is to propagate true Buddhism.

On the occasion of the November Kosen-rufu Shodai Ceremony last year, High Priest Nichinyo Shonin referred to a passage from the Bodhisattva Medicine King (*Yakuō bosatsu*; twenty-third) chapter of the Lotus Sutra and gave the following guidance:

It is taught that kōsen-rufu will be achieved without fail. However, it cannot be accomplished without our efforts. We, as the disciples and followers of Nichiren Daishonin, must be aware that we have an important mission to fulfill. We must conduct shakubuku in order to save all living beings. This is the great act of compassion. Through carrying out this mission, we will be able to gain the boundless wisdom of the Buddha and receive immeasurable benefits.

*(Dainichiren, no. 826, p. 22)*

The source of confusion in the world is found in teachings that are driven by greed and those that have lost sight of good reason and logic. It is our duty and our mission to propagate the teaching that is based on the correct principles of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Furthermore, as priests and lay believers, we each must carry out our tasks in our individual roles and, in absolute unity, continue to strive toward the accomplishment of kosen-rufu. Then, we will be able to achieve our designated objectives and open the path to kosen-rufu.

I pray that all temples and propagation centers that have not as yet accomplished their goal of increasing their membership by 50 percent will be able to do so by March 7. Furthermore, for the temples and propagation centers that already have successfully reached their goals, I pray that they will be able to achieve their goals for this year, as we all strive to increase the Hokkeko membership to 800,000 believers by 2021, the 800th anniversary of the birth of our master Nichiren Daishonin. I pray for your continued good health and for you to advance with devotion, so that you can accomplish the objectives for this year.