

Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin  
August 2010, Oko Lecture

***Fundamental Darkness and the  
Sharp Sword of the Mystic Law  
(ganpon no mummyō, Myoho no riken)***

The term “fundamental” (*ganpon*) refers to the root or the origin of all things. “Darkness” (*mummyō*) describes a condition devoid of light or a pervasively dark delusion.

Therefore, the term “fundamental darkness” (*ganpon no mummyō*) signifies the source of all delusions of the people. It is also referred to as “basic darkness” (*konpon mummyō*) and “darkness from time without beginning” (*mushi mummyō*). It is the fundamental delusion based on the earthly desires that we inherently possess in our lives. Because of these earthly desires, it is difficult for us to even be aware of our own delusion. It is all the more difficult to defeat and eliminate it.

Today, I would like to focus on how to overcome and eradicate this fundamental darkness, based on Shakyamuni’s Buddhism, the Gosho of Nichiren Daishonin, and the directions of our High Priest.

Earthly desires refer to the covetous feelings and various distracting thoughts that are inherent in the lives of all people. There are reportedly 84,000 such desires, and these are the foremost hindrances that obstruct us from attaining enlightenment. The Great Teacher Tiantai taught that there are three types of earthly desires that prevent people from continuing their Buddhist practice. They are called the three categories of illusion—the illusions of thought and desire (*kenji waku*), the illusions innumerable as particles of dust and sand (*jinja waku*), and the illusion of fundamental darkness (*mummyō waku*).

According to the doctrines of the perfect teaching (*engyō*) expounded by Shakyamuni, there are forty-two levels of illusions that a bodhisattva must eradicate. Of these, the last level to be eradicated is the illusion of fundamental darkness. The Daishonin writes the following in the Gosho, “Letter to the Brothers” (*“Kyōdai-shō”*):

The great evil demon of fundamental darkness is able to enter into the life of even a bodhisattva at the highest stage of the near enlightenment (*tōgaku*) and prevent him from attaining the benefits of the final stage of enlightenment (*myōgaku*) of the Lotus Sutra. How much easier it would be for this devil to prevent all others who are at a lower stage!

(*Gosho*, p. 980)

In this passage, fundamental darkness is personified as a great evil demon that can enter into the mind and body of even a bodhisattva who has reached the forty-first stage of bodhisattva practice and prevent him from attaining Buddhahood. The Daishonin explains that it is even more difficult for all others [who have not achieved that high stage] to eradicate fundamental darkness from their lives.

Fundamental darkness is the most extreme of all the earthly desires. The Daishonin states the following in the Goshō, “On Prayer” (*“Kitō-shō”*):

The Devil of the Sixth Heaven, who personifies fundamental darkness, entered into the bodies of all the people and caused them to look upon the Buddha as an enemy, so as to obstruct him from expounding his teachings. Therefore, King Virudhaka killed five hundred individuals of the Shakya kingdom. Angulimala hounded the Buddha. Devadatta heaved a huge rock at him. Chinchamanavika, a Brahman woman, placed a pot on her belly and declared that she was carrying the Buddha’s child. The lord of a Brahman city announced that anyone who allowed the Buddha safe passage into the city would be fined five hundred *ryō* in gold pieces. As a consequence, the people set up a thorny blockade on the road, dropped excrement into the wells, set up a barbed barrier at the gate, and spiked the Buddha’s food with poison. They did all this because they loathed him.

(*Goshō*, p. 624)

Thus, the Daishonin explains that fundamental darkness takes the form of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven and gains entry into the lives of all people and wreaks havoc, causing them to slander, hate, and harm the Buddha. As a result, Shakyamuni encountered various forms of persecution.

The Devil of the Sixth Heaven is another name for Heavenly King Takejizaiten who functions to obstruct people from performing their Buddhist practice. This devil depletes the life force of individuals and steals away their benefits. The Daishonin states the following in his Goshō, “Letter to the Brothers” (*“Kyōdai-shō”*):

This world represents the terrain of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. All people have been his karmic associates ever since time without beginning.

(*Goshō*, p. 980)

Ryōkan of Gokurakuji Temple deceived people in society and caused them to admire him as though he were a living Buddha. In reality, however, he was intent on killing Nichiren Daishonin. Hei no Saemon-no-jō used his

political authority to persecute Nichiren Daishonin. These are instances in which the Devil of the Sixth Heaven entered into the lives of these men to perform evil deeds to the Daishonin.

Similarly in our society today, even if individuals are considered to be good people, if they slander true Buddhism, they will inevitably be associates of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. The more we exert efforts in our practice and strive to become happy, the more the obstacles arise one after another to impede our progress. As we proceed toward attaining enlightenment, devilish influences try to prevent us from severing our association with the devil.

A passage in “Recorded Lectures” (“*Onkō kikigaki*”) states:

The word ‘doubt’ represents fundamental darkness.

(*Gosho*, p. 1829)

Furthermore, the “Orally Transmitted Teachings” (“*Ongi kuden*”) explains:

The arrogant five thousand individuals manifested fundamental darkness.

(*Gosho*, p. 1732)

When Shakyamuni was about to expound the Lotus Sutra, there were five thousand arrogant individuals who did not believe him when he announced that he had not yet revealed the truth in more than forty years of preaching. These arrogant people took their departure and were never able to encounter and listen to the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, harboring doubts causes people to dissociate themselves from the direct path to enlightenment and, furthermore, causes them to renounce their faith.

Next, I would like to focus on the sharp sword to cut through fundamental darkness. In the *Gosho*, “A Comparison of the Lotus Sutra and Other Sutras” (“*Shokyō to hokekyō to nan’i no koto*”), Nichiren Daishonin writes:

What other doctrine could possibly surpass this teaching? It is the great lantern that illuminates the long night of the sufferings of birth and death and the sharp sword that severs the fundamental darkness of life.

(*Gosho*, p. 1468)

“This teaching” refers to the Lotus Sutra. Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō of *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in a single life moment), hidden in the depths of the Life Span (*Juryō*) chapter of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, is the great lantern that illuminates the dark night. It is the sharp sword that eradicates fundamental darkness.

The Goshō, “Recorded Lectures” (*“Onkō kiki-gaki”*) contains the following passage:

The great medicine to eliminate the fundamental darkness of life is none other than Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō.

(*Goshō*, p. 1848)

The Daishōnin further states in the Goshō, “On the Meaning of the True Entity of Myōhō-Renge-Kyō” (*“Tōtaigi-shō”*):

Even the principle of the reality of the supreme life condition (*ichi myō shinnyō no ri*) will become an entity of delusion if it encounters negative influences; however, it will manifest enlightenment if it encounters positive influences. Enlightenment is none other than the manifestation of the true nature of the Law. Delusion characterizes none other than fundamental darkness.

(*Goshō*, p. 692)

Here, “positive influences” refer to faith in the Gohonzon, and “negative influences” refer to associations with heresy and slander. Even if we uphold faith, the three poisons of greed, anger, and stupidity can be forceful influences, and arrogance can easily take root in our lives. Thus, the flames of the earthly desires of fundamental darkness are truly difficult to extinguish.

When we view this from the standpoint of faith and practice in Nichiren Shōshū, we find that positive influences are characterized by actions that extend beyond the mere formality of accepting faith. They include such actions as going to worship the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching—the essence of the sharp sword of the mystic Law (*Myōhō*)—and steadily upholding a sincere practice for oneself and others, based on the directions of our High Priest, who has received the transmission of the Heritage of the Law. High Priest Nichinyō Shōnin stated the following about fundamental darkness:

Nichiren Daishōnin states in the “Orally Transmitted Teachings” (*“Ongi kuden”*):

*Ichinen sanzen* arises from the single character “faith,” (*shin*) and the attainment of the Buddha way by all Buddhas of the three existences also comes from the single character “faith.” This character is the sharp sword that can cut through the fundamental darkness. The statement, “Having no doubt is called belief,” demonstrates that faith is the sharp sword to sever and remove doubts and delusions.

(*Goshō*, p. 1737)

The same Goshō further states:

The single character “faith” is the single source to accept and embrace this true Law. The single character “faith” is the sharp sword that will subjugate the fundamental darkness.

(*Gosho*, p. 1764)

What Nichiren Daishonin means is that having absolute faith in the Gohonzon is like having a sharp sword that will cut away the fundamental darkness, the illusion that dwells in the depths of the minds of common mortals. However, Nichikan Shonin stated the following in “Commentary on the *Awakening of Faith*” (“*Daijō kishin-ron giki*”):

One may have belief, but without practice, it will not be strong faith. Faith without practice causes one to easily abandon faith when one encounters evil influences.

(*Six-Volume Writings*, p. 71)

It is certain that faith must go together with practice. If one has faith but does not practice, it is far from being solid faith. One who depends on faith without practice will be unable to resist evil influences. Therefore, faith must combine both belief and practice. Likewise, shakubuku must be performed with real action. Otherwise, it cannot be considered to be shakubuku. Shakubuku is not just verbal. By performing, experiencing, and actualizing shakubuku, we can, for the first time, be blessed with boundless benefit from the Dai-Gohonzon.

(On the occasion of the Kosen-rufu Shodai Ceremony, May 4, 2008)

Our High Priest teaches that the sharp sword to sever fundamental darkness is none other than upholding faith without harboring doubts, based on the principle, “having no doubts is to have faith” (*mugi wasshin*). He further explains that we must sincerely believe in the Gohonzon, put forth our utmost efforts in doing Gongyo and chanting Daimoku, and based on the benefits of doing so, proceed to do shakubuku.

Let us uphold faith characterized by the principle “having no doubts is to have faith.” Let us sever the fundamental darkness within our own lives and form a solid unity between priests and lay believers. Let’s advance with great devotion and successfully achieve the objective established by our High Priest Nichinyo Shonin to increase the number of Hokkeko believers by fifty percent by the year 2015, five years from now.