

**.Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin
September 2012, Oko Lecture**

Repaying our Debts of Gratitude through Upholding Faith and Propagating True Buddhism

Located in Kagawa Prefecture in the Shikoku Region, which is approximately 700 kilometers west of the Head Temple, is the well-known and historic Sanuki Honmonji Temple. It is one of the major temples of Nichiren Shoshu. Since olden times, for more than 700 years, the priests and lay believers of Honmonji Temple have continued to uphold the Law. The pulse of their faith and practice is based on the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, enshrined at Head Temple Taisekiji, and the directions of the successive High Priests, who have received the transmission of the Heritage of the Law. Their solemn dignity is like a majestic mountain, solid and unshakable, as they continue to protect and support the precious dignity of our faith and practice.

Well-known among the priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu is the fact that the continuous protection and support at that temple are based on the legacy of Nissen Shonin, the disciple of the Second High Priest Nikko Shonin, who endured persecutions and propagated the Law. This spirit to protect and support the temple also is handed down from the protection and support given by Akiyama Magojiro Yasutada-ko, the lay believer who founded the temple. Precisely because they formed this essential source of faith and practice, the priests and lay believers today have been able to establish a solid unity of *itai doshin*, thus fostering a beautiful relationship between the temple and the supporting believers.

Just like the Sanuki Honmonji Temple of olden times, many of the overseas temples and propagation centers are located in distant and remote places. No matter how distant they may be from the Head Temple, however, they continue to manifest the powerful spirit of faith, constantly focused on the Head Temple. The faith and practice of the priests and lay believers always are based on the Head Temple, regardless of whether the temples are overseas or in Japan. There is no difference, because the life force of faith—based on the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching and the directions of our High Priest—continues to flow regardless of the distance. Between olden times and today, there is absolutely no distinction in the sincere spirit of the priests who are dispatched to overseas temples and the local lay

believers who uphold the practice of the Three Great Secret Laws of Nichiren Daishonin and strive to achieve kōsen-rufu. I am convinced that, from now into the future, the development of kōsen-rufu in various countries and regions will be based on the spirit and attitude of the priests and lay believers today.

The generations who will follow us in the future will look to the distant past and recall the hardships experienced by their predecessors and offer to repay their debt of gratitude to them. Our history today proves that such a time inevitably will come. As the saying goes, “If the source is clear, then the flow will be equally clear.” The repayment of our debt of gratitude to our predecessors rests on our sincere efforts to achieve kōsen-rufu, following their will and determination.

In Nichiren Shoshu, a temple is established as a fortress of the Law in the region where it is built, in order to achieve kōsen-rufu, the ultimate propagation of the Buddhism of the Three Great Secret Laws of Nichiren Daishonin. When the priests and lay believers continue to uphold the objectives of their predecessors and carry on the pride that they held in their faith and practice—just like the priests and lay believers of Sanuki Honmonji Temple—they truly will repay their debt of gratitude to those who preceded them. In other words, the true repayment of one’s debt of gratitude is none other than faith and practice for the propagation of true Buddhism.

Nichikan Shonin, the Twenty-sixth High Priest of the Head Temple, stated:

What is the essential practice of the repayment of our debt of gratitude? Answer: The essential practice is to not begrudge our lives for the sake of the Law. In other words, we must not begrudge our lives in refuting heretical doctrines and propagating the true Law. Then, all repayments of our debts of gratitude will be rewarded with benefits. (*Gosho mondan*, p. 384)

From the past and into the future, Nichiren Shoshu continues to uphold the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, exactly as he preached them, and strives to achieve kōsen-rufu, pioneering the long road to the salvation of all mankind. Herein lies the path for us to attain enlightenment in this lifetime.

We have received our designated objectives for 2015 and 2021 from our High Priest, and we, the priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu, are advancing to achieve kōsen-rufu in the future. All of you, the believers of the local temples and regions who possess a profound karmic bond with your predecessors, are the very individuals who will carry on their will. You were born on this soil, you encountered true Buddhism here, and you are praying for kōsen-rufu in this land. Indeed, you possess a mystic karmic bond from the past.

Nichiren Daishonin established the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching for the sake of the entire Jambudvīpa world, in order to achieve kōsen-rufu in the family, in the region, in the nation, and throughout the

world. Those of us who uphold the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin must advance with devotion to achieve *kōsen-rufu* in the future. Indeed, this is the true repayment of our debt of gratitude to the Buddha, the three treasures, and all our predecessors who have given their lives to the great Law. Thus, we must stand tall and proceed forth. We must realize that living for *kōsen-rufu* is the most essential action to repay our debt of gratitude. Our true Buddhist practice begins when we take responsibility to accomplish this.

Faith always must be accompanied by actual practice. Nichiren Daishonin wrote the following in his Goshō, “Reply to Nichigon-ama” (“*Nichigon-ama gozen go-henji*”):

I have offered it to the Lotus Sutra and informed the deities of the sun and the moon...Whether or not your prayers come true depends upon your faith. I, Nichiren, am not responsible at all [for the outcome]. If the water is clear, the moon will be reflected in it. If the wind blows, the trees will sway back and forth. The minds of people are like the water. Weak faith is like muddy water, while pure and resolute faith is like clear water. Keep in mind that the trees are like the principles of reason, and the swaying caused by the wind is comparable to the recitation of the sutra.

(*Goshō*, p. 1519)

Details are scarce concerning the nun Nichigon, who is the recipient of this Goshō. She apparently was associated with Takahashi Rokuro-bei, the husband of Nikko Shonin’s aunt. She wrote a letter to the Daishonin, asking him to pray for all her prayers to come true. She dispatched a servant with her letter and a Gokuyo offering. This Goshō is the Daishonin’s response to her request. Nichiren Daishonin told her that whether or not her prayers are answered depends upon her faith. Furthermore, he provided her with an explanation of the principles of reason.

We frequently talk about faith. We can understand the concept that our lives are dependent on our faith. We realize that we have embraced true Buddhism, which enables us to receive effects without fail. Based on this premise, the rest is up to our own faith.

“If the water is clear, the moon will be reflected in it.” This is a principle of reason. The moon cannot be reflected in muddy water. The Buddha will reside in our hearts, just like the moon will reside in the reflection of clear water. Such is the description of our faith. “If the wind blows, the trees will sway back and forth.” This describes the movement of the wind. In the same way, when we stir up our faith, like the wind, we will find that results will be manifested without fail. “Swaying caused by the wind is comparable to the recitation of the sutra.” This means that the sutra is the teaching and the Law. Reciting the sutra refers to physical recitation and actual practice.

In the Daishonin's Buddhism, actual practice is an essential component of faith. We must make certain that we do not look upon faith as a theoretical concept and argue reason and theory.

Twenty-sixth High Priest Nichikan Shonin stated:

The power of the Law and the power of the Buddha truly reside in the object of worship. You must not doubt this. On our part, we must simply strive to put forth our efforts in our power of faith and power of practice. *(Gosho mondan, p. 629)*

Here, "strive to put forth our efforts in our power of faith and power of practice" refers to chanting Daimoku and doing actual practice. Moreover, our High Priest Nichinyo Shonin clearly stated:

True Buddhism represents actual practice. We can amass benefits through our experiences.

(Dai-Nichiren, vol. 760, p. 42)

He instructs that, in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of the sowing, hidden in the depths of the sutra, from the infinite past of *kuon-ganjo*, the entity of the Law (*hottai*) is the actual teaching. The way to achieve benefits in our practice is through the entity of practice (*gyōtai*), the principles of practice (*gyōgi*), and actual practice (*jissen*). In the Gosho, "On the Transmission of the Three Great Secret Laws" ("*Sandai hiho bonjo ji*"), Nichiren Daishonin wrote:

It [the Law] is the Object of Worship of the *Juryo* chapter, the High Sanctuary, and the five characters of the Daimoku that he originally practiced in the distant past to attain the ultimate truth.

(Gosho, p. 1593)

Here, the Daishonin explains that the great Law from the infinite past of *kuon-ganjo* is the doctrine that was established through the very entity of the actual practice of the True Buddha. Our Honorable Retired High Priest Nikken Shonin provided the following explanation concerning the profound doctrine of the Three Great Secret Laws:

(The doctrine of the Three Great Secret Laws) lies in the actual entity of Nichiren Daishonin, based on the principles of "wisdom is in itself the object of worship" (*kyochi soku honzon*), "the Buddha's practice is in itself Daimoku" (*shogyo soku Daimoku*), and "the Buddha's dwelling is in itself the High Sanctuary" (*shoju soku kaidan*).

He teaches that everything is based on Nichiren Daishonin's actions. Thus, it naturally follows that we can manifest benefits and positive karmic effects in our lives through taking action in our Buddhist practice.

Consequently, we must engage in actual practice, based on an increasingly strong conviction in the Gohonzon. The Buddhism that we uphold enables all of our prayers to come true. The Honorable High Priest is instructing us to manifest karmic results through actual practice. It is important for us always to keep this in mind.

Fifty-sixth High Priest Nichio Shonin stated:

The following is written in the text of *Xunzi*: "Do not seek to draw spring water from a deep well by using a short rope." According to this saying, there is a deep well. When one peers into the well from above, he is unable to determine whether or not there is water below, since the well is extremely deep. The individual lowers a water bucket to see if there is any water, but he still is unable to determine this. As a result, he assumes that there is no water in the well. In fact, the well is not dry. It actually has an abundance of clear, cool water. However, the well is deep and it is impossible for anyone to simply see whether or not there is water. In addition, the rope on the water bucket is too short and cannot reach the water. Consequently, the person assumes that the well is dry and contains no water. In short, this saying describes the effects of one's shortcomings. The same is true for faith in the great Law. We are limited by our lack of perception in our faith and our shortcomings in our practice, like the short rope on the water bucket. Thus, we are unaware that we can draw on the profound wisdom of the mystic Gohonzon, much like one is able to draw the clear water from the well. We may assume that the Gohonzon has no benefits, much like the individual who assumes that there is no bounty of clear water in the well.

(Collected Writings of Nichio Shonin, vol. 1, p. 266)

As this explanation shows, the results from our faith are dependent on the profundity of our faith and practice. If we remain unaware of the profundity of our faith and if our practice is deficient, like the short rope on the water bucket, we will not be able to draw upon the profound wisdom of the Gohonzon, just like the clear water in the well cannot be reached. To have conviction in the Gohonzon is to never give up and to thoroughly perform our practice to the very end, with the conviction that we will achieve great results. It is to exert forth our utmost efforts until our prayers come true.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote the following in the Goshō, "On Prayer" (*"Kito-sho"*):

Even if one points to the earth and misses it, even if one is able to tie up the emptiness of the sky, even if the tides cease to ebb and flow, and even if the sun rises from the west, the prayers of the votary of the Lotus Sutra will never go unanswered.

(Gosho, p. 630)

No matter what, our prayers always will come true without fail. Furthermore, our High Priest Nichinyo Shonin stated:

Chanting Daimoku is the practice for ourselves. Doing shakubuku is the practice for others. The practice for ourselves and the practice for others constitute a single entity. Accordingly, we can say that exerting forth great efforts in chanting Daimoku and doing shakubuku represent the prime point of faith. When we thoroughly practice these fundamentals of faith, we definitely will be able to manifest the condition described in the following golden words of the Daishonin: “The prayers of the votary of the Lotus Sutra will never go unanswered.”

(Collection of Guidance [Goshinan shu], vol. 7, p. 20)

Now is the time for us, as individuals who uphold the Gohonzon, to further deepen our faith and exert ourselves in our practices of Daimoku and shakubuku. Let's advance with ever more devotion to achieve the designated objectives, based on the directions of our High Priest.