

Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin
February 2015, Oko Lecture

Repaying Our Debt of Gratitude to the Buddha (*Button hōsha*)

The principle of repaying our debt of gratitude to the Buddha (*button hōsha*) means that people should repay their debt of gratitude for the Buddha's compassion and appreciate the benefits they have received from him.

The Buddha, who saves all mankind, possesses the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent. These three virtues are discussed in the Parable (*Hiyu*; third) chapter of the Lotus Sutra:

Now this threefold world is all my domain, and the living beings in it are all my children. Now this place is beset by many pains and trials. I am the only person who can rescue and protect others.

(*Hokekyo*, p. 168; *The Lotus Sutra*, Watson, pp. 69-70)

The three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent possessed by Shakyamuni are described here. The virtue of sovereign refers to the protective function toward all people. The virtue of teacher represents the function to lead all mankind to the correct path. The virtue of parent signifies the function to cultivate and love all people.

In the introductory paragraph to *The Opening of the Eyes* (Kaimoku-shō), Nichiren Daishonin points out the three virtues in the Latter Day of the Law:

These are three types of people that all men and women should respect—the sovereign, teacher, and parent.

(*Gosho*, p. 523)

Then, at the end of this Gosho, he writes:

I, Nichiren, am the sovereign, teacher, father, and mother to all people in Japan.

(*Gosho*, p. 577)

The following passage appears in the *Transfer Document on the Birth of Nichiren Daishonin* (Ubuyu sōjō no koto):

I, Nichiren, am the sovereign, the father, the mother, and the teacher of all mankind in the entirety of the world.... Throughout the three existences, Nichiren is the master of these three realms.

(*Gosho*, p. 1710)

Thus, Nichiren Daishonin, himself, revealed that he is the master of the Buddhism of the sowing and the Buddha endowed with the three virtues of sovereign, teacher, and parent in the Latter Day of the Law.

Nichiren Daishonin was born on the 16th day of the second month of the first year of Jō'ō (1222), one year following the Jōkyū Rebellion [when imperial forces tried to take over the Hojo regents of the shogunate]. His birthplace was in Kata'umi in the province of Awa (present day Kamogawa City, Chiba Prefecture, and formerly the village of Amatsu Kominato in Awa Province). His childhood name was Zennichi maro. He entered priesthood at the age of 16 and took the Buddhist name Zeshō-bō Renchō. He traveled extensively to study in various places, including Mt. Hiei. When he was 32 years of age, he established true Buddhism based on Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, hidden in the depths of the sutra of the Buddhism of the sowing. At that time, he adopted the name Nichiren. He had not been taught by a master and, in fact, had manifested his form as a Buddha through self-enlightenment.

The following passage is from the Wondrous Powers of the Tathagata (*Jinriki*; twenty-first) chapter of the Lotus Sutra:

Just as the sunlight or moonlight dispels the darkness, this person will practice [Myoho-Renge-Kyo] in the world and eliminate [the fundamental] darkness of all living beings.

(*Hokekyo*, p. 516)

Nichiren Daishonin lived in the midst of a world of darkness and gloom, with continuous calamities, such as warfare, natural disasters, famines, droughts, and epidemics. In the form of a common mortal priest—as indicated by the phrase “this person”—he manifested and experienced with his life the persecutions that were predicted in the Encouraging Devotion (*Kanji*; thirteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

Then, on the 12th day of the tenth month of the second year of Kō'an (1279), he inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching. His action will bring salvation to all mankind throughout the Jambudvipa world, for ten thousand years and beyond into the eternity of the Latter Day of the Law. This represents the tremendously brilliant light that correctly illuminates the darkness, and is a manifestation of his great compassion as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. Precisely because of the arrival of the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law, Nichiren Daishonin made his advent into this world and established the great Law of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

A passage from the *Orally Transmitted Teachings* (Ongi kuden) states:

The various hardships suffered by all people are entirely the hardships of Nichiren alone.

(*Gosho*, p. 1771)

Furthermore, he taught the following in the Goshō, *Aspirations for the Buddha Land* (Toki nyudo dono gohenji):

Life is limited, so we must not begrudge it. Our ultimate aspiration should be the Buddha land.

(*Goshō*, p. 488)

Thus, Nichiren Daishonin continuously prayed for the happiness of all mankind and the establishment of a peaceful Buddha land.

However, even if the Buddha expounds the Law for the salvation of all mankind, the people cannot attain the life condition of enlightenment unless they believe in the Law and advance on the correct path. We must follow the Buddha, whose intent is to lead the people, and respond to him by upholding faith and practice, seeking to be saved by his teachings. By so doing, we can take our first step toward achieving happiness. When we embrace Buddhism, we first pledge to uphold the three treasures of the Buddha, the Law, and the priesthood.

The three treasures hidden in the depths of the sutra in the Buddhism of the sowing can save all people in the Latter Day of the Law. They are the treasure of the Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, the True Buddha from the infinite past of *kuon-ganjo*; the treasure of the Law, the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, which is Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō of actual *ichinen sanzen* (three thousand realms in a single life-moment); and the treasure of the priesthood, which is represented by the Second High Priest Nikkō Shōnin and the successive High Priests who have received the Lifeblood Heritage of the Law entrusted to a single person from Nichiren Daishonin.

In *The Four Debts of Gratitude* (Shion-shō), Nichiren Daishonin writes:

The treasures of the Buddha and the Law will invariably endure through the priesthood.

(*Goshō*, p. 268)

Nichiren Daishonin teaches us that both the treasure of the Buddha and that of the Law are perpetuated by the treasure of the priesthood. Thus, it is important in revering and believing in the three treasures in Nichiren Shōshū that we must trust and follow the directions of our High Priest, who has received the transmission of the Heritage of the Law entrusted to a single person, based on the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching.

In the Goshō *Repaying Debts of Gratitude* (Hō'on-shō), the Daishonin states:

The aged fox will never turn its back on the knoll where his home lies, and the white turtle repaid his debt of gratitude to Mao Bao. Since even animals know to behave in this way, those with human morals should be all the more aware.

(*Goshō*, p. 999)

Nichiren Daishonin points out that even animals repay their debts of gratitude. Therefore, we, as individuals in the Latter Day of the Law, should appreciate and embrace all that we have received and seek to repay our debts of gratitude. Such is the proper way to proceed as human beings.

Furthermore, in *The Four Debts of Gratitude* (Shion-shō), Nichiren Daishonin explains:

If one wishes to repay one's debt of gratitude to the Buddhas, he should also do so to the Law...Common mortals in the Latter Day of the Law, although benefiting from the virtues of the three treasures, do not even try to repay their debts of gratitude. Therefore, how can they expect to complete all the practices of the Buddha way and attain Buddhahood?

(*Gosho*, p. 268)

The way for us to attain Buddhahood is to repay our debts of gratitude to the three treasures. To accomplish this, we must do morning and evening Gongyo assiduously and chant Daimoku. Then, based on the joy and benefits that we receive, we must exert our utmost efforts to do shakubuku. As a result, we will be repaying our debts of gratitude to the Buddha.

Nichiren Daishonin writes in *On Unpolished Rice* (Beikoku-gosho):

I entrust you with the responsibility of propagating true Buddhism in your province. The seeds of Buddhahood can sprout when they respond to a particular karmic relation.

(*Gosho*, p. 1242)

In order to repay our debts of gratitude to the Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, which are infinitely vast and profound, all priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu must uphold our great mission to firmly embrace the true Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, based on the practice for ourselves and for others.

On the occasion of the Overseas Believers Summer Study Tozan last year, High Priest Nichinyo Shonin gave the following guidance:

Now, we should carry out shakubuku, and lead as many people as we can to the teaching of Myoho-Renge-Kyo of sowing the seed of the true cause. This is the secret Law of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, which will save all living beings and purify the world in the Latter Day of the Law, which is tainted by the five impurities. Furthermore, we must strive in our practice more than ever, aiming toward the achievement of the happiness of all people and the realization of true world peace.

We finally will welcome the auspicious occasion of the 770th anniversary of the birth of Second High Priest Nikko Shonin in March of next year. I sincerely pray that all members of every country definitely will have accomplished their objective of increasing the Hokkeko membership by 50 percent by then, and will joyfully report their achievement to the three treasures.

(NSM, October 2014, p. 26)

This year, we finally have come upon the 770th anniversary of the birth of Nikko Shonin. Let us proceed with devotion, and etch into our hearts the conviction that the foremost way to repay our debts of gratitude to the Buddha is to put forth our utmost efforts in chanting Daimoku and doing shakubuku, following the guidance of High Priest Nichinyo Shonin.