

Questions and Answers between a Sage and a Foolish Man (Shōgu mondō-shō)

The world today is defiled with impurities. People's minds are distorted, filled with envy, and provisional and slanderous teachings abound. This makes it difficult for the true Law to be propagated. At such a time, it is of no use to practice the reading, reciting, and transcribing of sutras, or to contemplate, meditate, or discipline oneself. You simply must perform shakubuku. You should powerfully vanquish slanderous teachings, and use the doctrines to censure erroneous teachings to the best of your ability....You must observe the situation at present, and deeply consider whether this is a country where only the correct Law prevails or where erroneous teachings are rampant. (Gosho, p. 403)

Explanation of the Gosho Passage

The present world is defiled. The minds of the people are resentful and twisted, and only the slanders of provisional teachings thrive. Thus, it is difficult for true Buddhism to spread. At a time like this, practices such as reciting or copying the sutra, meditation, or striving to achieve the meditative form, and other forms of self-improvement are all useless. We must only do shakubuku and forcefully exert our utmost efforts to refute the slander of the Law. Moreover, we must use the doctrines to refute heretical teachings. As we look at the world today, we must seriously consider whether ours is a country where only true Buddhism will smoothly spread or one where heretical doctrines will flourish.

Explanation of the Major Terms

- 1) **Defiled world:** A world that is tarnished and impure. The conditions that prevail in the Latter Day of the Law, where evil and negativity flourish.
- 2) **Provisional teachings:** Provisional means temporary. All scriptures preceding the Lotus Sutra.
- 3) **Contemplation:** Essential introspection; calm, clear observation. To sincerely and profoundly contemplate.
- 4) **Meditate:** Here, a word used to describe Zen Buddhist practice. It means “endeavoring with devotion to achieve the seated Zen meditation form.”
- 5) **Discipline oneself:** To forge and devote oneself to self-improvement, in order to develop character, learning, and accomplishments.
- 6) **Only the Correct [Law]:** Singular and pure. Immaculate.

Background and Summary

This Gosho was written in the fifth year of Bunnei (1268). The addressee is unknown. It consists of two parts. The sage and the foolish man indicated in the title represent a wise man who propagates the true Buddhism of the Lotus Sutra and a foolish man who is ignorant of the principles of Buddhism. The format of the writing is seven questions and answers. The Gosho presents the foolish man, who travels through the practices of Confucianism as well as those of the Ritsu, Shingon, Zen, and the Nembutsu sects. He meets the sage and asks him various questions.

Meanwhile, the sage refutes these provisional doctrines and instructs the foolish man, who finally embraces Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

The section of the Gosho on which we are focused here teaches that, in these defiled times of the Latter Day of the Law, full of the slanders of provisional teachings, various practices such as contemplation and meditation, which were performed in the Former and Middle Days of the Law, are

now completely useless. Rather, one simply must embrace Myoho-Renge-Kyo, do shakubuku, defeat slander of the Law, and refute heretical doctrines.

Reference from Gosho passages and High Priest guidances

Questions and Answers between a Sage and a Foolish Man:

When erroneous doctrines of various sects become rampant and compete against each other, gaining acclaim by taking the stance that their respective doctrines are superior to others; and when incorrect teachings are viewed as equal to the correct Law, and Mahayana and Hinayana followers fight with each other over what is correct—this is the time, above all else, to refute these slanderers. This is the practice of shakubuku. The Lotus Sutra and Nirvana Sutra both state that if one is unaware of this principle, and is mistaken about the implementation of shōju and shakubuku, one will be far removed from receiving the benefit of attaining Buddhahood. Rather, one will fall into hell.

(*Gosho*, p. 402)

Guidance from High Priest Nichinyo Shonin:

You would be going against the Daishonin's golden words if you thought, "Even if I do not do shakubuku, it would be sufficient for me to do morning and evening Gongyō and attend the Okō Ceremony and other events at the temple from time to time." You never would be able to achieve happiness if you maintained a practice that opposes the golden words of the True Buddha.

(*Dainichiren*, February 2010)

Guidance from High Priest Nichinyo Shonin:

Shakubuku is an act of compassion for the salvation of all mankind. It is sowing the seed of the five characters of Myoho-Renge-Kyo of the true cause of the Buddhism of the sowing into the fields—the hearts—of the people—who are tainted by poison from slandering the Law through upholding heretical doctrines and sects, and who are writhing in suffering, steeped in the three poisons. It is the best and most superior practice that will lead the people to the life condition of enlightenment in their present form. It is the precious mission that was entrusted to the followers of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who are the most significant of all in Mahayana Buddhism.

Thus, the Daishonin wrote the following in the *Gosho*, *Questions and Answers between a Sage and a Foolish Man* (Shōgu mondō-shō): "The world today is defiled with impurities. People's minds are distorted, filled with envy, and provisional and slanderous teachings abound. This makes it difficult for the true Law to be propagated. At such a time, it is of no use to practice the reading, reciting, and transcribing of sutras, or to contemplate, meditate, or discipline oneself. You simply must perform shakubuku. You should powerfully vanquish slanderous teachings, and use the doctrines to censure erroneous teachings to the best of your ability." (*Gosho*, p. 403)

....In all of his writings, the Daishonin states that people who see the enemies of the Lotus Sutra and do not denounce them and do not do shakubuku are those whom the Nirvana Sutra censures as people who "lack compassion and are falsely intimate" and who are the "sworn enemies of true Buddhism." In other words, they are the resentful enemies of Buddhism. The Daishonin is extremely strict with those who do not perform shakubuku.

Conversely, this means that he indicates that those who do perform shakubuku will receive tremendous benefits....We must understand that having a cerebral awareness of the great benefits of doing shakubuku is useless. It is important for us to advance a step beyond this theoretical notion and actually experience such benefits by taking actual action ourselves to do shakubuku.

(*Dainichiren*, May 2018)