

Attaining Enlightenment at the Initial Stage of Faith Through the Lotus Sutra (Hokke shoshin jōbutsu-shō)

The people in the world today have turned their backs on the Lotus Sutra and, for that offense, they will undoubtedly fall into hell. In any case, one should strongly teach and make people listen to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Those who follow and take faith in it will be able to attain enlightenment, and even those who slander it will likewise attain Buddhahood in the end through the poison-drum relationship. In any case, the seed of Buddhahood can be found nowhere other than the Lotus Sutra.

(Gosho, p. 1316)

Explanation

The people of the world today, in any event, will undoubtedly fall into hell, as a result of turning their backs on the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, by all means, one should resolutely expound the Lotus Sutra to them and cause them to listen to it. Those who believe in it will attain Buddhahood, and those who slander it will also eventually achieve Buddhahood by establishing a poison-drum relationship with it. In any event, the seed of Buddhahood is never outside the Lotus Sutra.

Explanation of the Major Terms

- *The people in the world today...will undoubtedly fall into hell:* This means that even if people do not directly slander the Lotus Sutra, the act of putting their faith in a heretical teaching is, in itself, a rejection of true Buddhism and, therefore, would cause them to fall into hell.
- *Poison drum (dokku):* In the Nirvana Sutra (*Nehan-gyō*), there is a metaphor about "...a drum smeared with poison. When the drum is struck, people who hear it will die, even if they do not intend to hear it." (Taisho Tripitaka, 12-420A).
- *Seed of Buddhahood (hotoke no tane):* The cause for people to attain enlightenment is likened here to the seed of a plant. It is none other than Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyo, the essential truth of the Lotus Sutra.

Background and Summary

This Gosho was a letter written in the first year of Kō an (1278), in Minobu, when Nichiren Daishonin was 57 years of age. The recipient is believed to be Myōhō ama, a believer who lived in Okanomiya in Suruga Province (presently Numazu City, Shizuoka Prefecture).

The phrase "initial stage of faith" (*shoshin*) in the title of this Gosho refers to an initial religious awakening that causes a person to aspire to uphold the Buddhist practice. All of us, who were born in the Latter Day of the Law, do not possess the seed of Buddhahood, since we never received the transmission of the seed of Buddhahood in the past to develop a karmic bond. Therefore, in this sense, we all are people at the initial stage of faith.

This Gosho uses the question and answer format to explain the respective truth and heresy with regards to the Lotus Sutra and the expedient, provisional teachings. It reveals that the teaching of Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyo, hidden in the depths of the Buddhism of the sowing, is, in fact, the one and only true Law that must be heard by the votaries who are initially aspiring to practice, and which must be sown into their hearts.

Moreover, the Daishonin states:

In the age of the Latter Day of the Law, regardless of the appropriateness of the capacity of the ignorant people, we must strongly teach them the title—the five characters—of the Lotus Sutra and enable them to embrace it. (Gosho, p. 1315)

Thus, he teaches that, in the Latter Day of the Law, the Buddhist practice that is appropriate for the times is none other than thoroughly teaching the doctrine of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo—that is, to perform the actual practice of shakubuku.

Later in the Gosho, he explains that, when we do shakubuku, the three powerful enemies will compete with one another, without fail, to try to impede our progress. The Daishonin urges us never to succumb to these forces. He teaches that the path to enlightenment is single-mindedly devoting ourselves to uphold our faith and practice and achieve the propagation of true Buddhism.

Reference from Gosho passages and High Priest guidance

The Doctrine of Ichinen Sanzen: When one chants Myoho-Renge-Kyo, the Buddhahood inherent in one's life will be manifested. Those who have the opportunity to hear it will be able to eradicate their negative karma that has been accumulating for infinite *asamkhyā* kalpas. Those [who hear Myoho-Renge-Kyo] and rejoice for even a single life-moment, will attain Buddhahood in their present form. Even if they hear it but do not believe in it, this constitutes the sowing of the seed of Buddhahood. Thus, the sown seed will become mature and enable one to attain Buddhahood without fail. (Gosho, p. 109)

Directions From High Priest Nichinyo Shonin: Since olden times, Nichiren Shoshu has upheld an established fundamental precept that strictly admonishes slander. Accordingly, even if we exert our utmost efforts in our practice and we appear to accumulate benefits, the slightest slander will cause those benefits to immediately disappear. Therefore, we must constantly be vigilant and never slacken in our efforts to counter slander. To achieve this, we must never neglect to perform shakubuku. Furthermore, it is of foremost importance to refute slander and courageously advance to promote kōsen-rufu, the ultimate propagation of Myoho-Renge-Kyo. (Dainichiren, September 2018)

Onkō kikigaki (Recorded Lectures): Now is the time of the Latter Day of the Law, when one can attain Buddhahood by propagating the seven characters of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, and enable others to receive benefit [from the Buddha]. (Gosho, p. 1818)

Directions From High Priest Nichinyo Shonin: Now in the Latter Day of the Law, those without the seed of Buddhahood undoubtedly will fall into hell. This is because, even though they do not directly slander the Lotus Sutra, they believe in heretical teachings that go against the Lotus Sutra. Thus, whether they know it or not, they are committing the offense of slandering the Lotus Sutra, and this definitely will lead them to fall into hell. In any case, we should strongly teach people the Lotus Sutra. It is certain that those who follow and take faith in it will be able to attain enlightenment, and even those who slander it will likewise attain Buddhahood in the end through their poison-drum relationship. (Dainichiren, September 2016)

Directions From High Priest Nichinyo Shonin: Even though you may face opposition from a person whom you are trying to shakubuku, he or she will take faith in the end, by forming a reverse relationship with the Buddha, through sowing the seed of Myoho-Renge-Kyo into this person's heart. The Daishonin teaches, "In any case, one should strongly teach and make people listen to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra." Thus, it is extremely important for us to step forward and do shakubuku with courage and conviction, despite any obstacle that may arise.

(Dainichiren, April 2016)