

PRESENTER'S PACKAGE

"On Attaining Buddhahood In This Lifetime"
June 2006 Goshō Study

Background Synopsis:

I. Nichiren's Circumstances:

This Goshō was written in 1255, just two years after Nichiren established True Buddhism on April 28, 1253 by chanting Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō for the first time. He was living in Matsubagayatsu near Kamakura, the military capital of Japan, and propagating his teaching there. After his declaration of the Law, Nichiren openly refuted the Pure Land teachings (Nembutsu) at Seicho-ji temple, where he had studied Buddhism from age 12. He had to flee for his life because his actions enraged Tojō Kagenobu, the lord of the area and an ardent follower of the Pure Land school. During this initial phase of his new life, he gained many converts to his teaching in the Kamakura area.

II. The Recipient's Circumstances:

This Goshō is addressed to Toki Jonin, who had converted to Nichiren's teachings a year earlier. He was a well-educated man who had been serving as a steward for Lord Chiba, the constable of Shimosa Province. Nichiren entrusted him with a number of his more important works including *Letter from Sado* and *The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind*, one of his five major writings. After the Matsubagayatsu Persecution in the eighth month of 1260, Toki Jonin invited Nichiren to live at his residence. Nichiren stayed there for nearly half a year, during which time many people in Shimosa converted to his teaching.

III. Main Points of the Background for Our Study:

- 1) This writing is the first extant letter by Nichiren to a believer following his establishment of True Buddhism. He exhorts us to perceive the "mystic truth" which has existed in our lives since the origin of life itself, that truth being Myōhō-renge-kyō. He states: "If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime...." This indicates the practice that has the power to purify our lives, the chanting of Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō.
- 2) Nichiren also teaches us that our lives are identical to the Mystic Law, as are all phenomena. As human beings, we have the potential to affect everything in our environment. However, Nichiren admonishes that we should never seek the Law outside ourselves. Doing so invites delusion, which is the cause for suffering. He encourages us to maintain correct faith in the true Law throughout our lives.
- 3) President Ikeda states: "Were we to appear before others blessed with every good fortune and completely free of suffering, then no one could understand the greatness of the Mystic Law. Furthermore, it is unlikely that we could understand people's hearts. All our karmic sufferings we ourselves dared to choose so that we might overcome them and show proof of victory. We need to be confident of this. Since these are sufferings that we ourselves created in order to triumph over, our victory is certain. We cannot possibly be defeated" (*World Tribune*, 12/17/04, p. 3).

Gosho Key Points

Point 1:

Overcoming the Sufferings of Birth and Death

“If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-renge-kyo. Chanting Myoho-renge-kyo will enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life.”

- The sufferings of birth and death are simply the daily lives of everyone, whether or not they practice Nichiren’s Buddhism. No one can escape this aspect of human life. It is the inevitable consequence of birth as a human being in the Latter Day of the Law (our current age). As we make the transition from early childhood to adolescence and finally to adulthood, we gain a rudimentary understanding of the workings of human life, according to our own circumstances, but we often find ourselves powerless to control them. Nichiren teaches us that we can not only free ourselves from this suffering, but that we can also live each moment of our lives with happiness and fulfillment. This does not mean that problems and obstacles will cease to assail us once we start practicing Nichiren’s teachings; it means that we can overcome the suffering that is brought about by them and replace it with joy.
- People everywhere are crying out for the life-condition of the Buddha. The instantaneous nature of communication that exists in today’s world has a dual effect: it brings us news quickly but often leaves us with a sense of helplessness. People all over the world feel the reality of desperation as their lives are indelibly altered by events they cannot control. As practitioners of Nichiren’s Buddhism, we can teach others about the greatness and power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, awakening within them the life-condition of the Buddha which, as Nichiren states, is “innate in all life.” When we carry out this merciful and compassionate practice, we stimulate our own Buddha nature simultaneously. We all partake of the waters of life from the same well. It is up to us to make the taste of the water sweet or bitter. Propagation of the Law reinvigorates hope and justice within everyone.
- President Ikeda states: “The aim of Nichiren Buddhism is the happiness of all humankind. That is the purpose of spreading the correct teaching. It is a compassionate struggle to lead those suffering to enlightenment. The lifeblood of faith in Nichiren Buddhism does not exist apart from the practice of sharing Buddhism with others. The spirit of propagation is the Soka Gakkai’s foundation. The Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai declared, “The Lotus Sutra is the teaching of shakubuku, the refutation of provisional doctrines” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 394). Embracing these golden words, the Daishonin himself propagated with great vigor. Throughout his life, he consistently refuted false doctrines and erroneous teachings” (*World Tribune*, 9/17/04 [Special Pullout, p. III]).

Point 2:

My Life is an Entity of the Mystic Law

“Nevertheless, even though you chant and believe in Myoho-renge-kyo, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but an inferior teaching. ‘Inferior teaching’ means those other than this [Lotus] sutra, which are all expedient and provisional. No expedient or provisional teaching leads directly to enlightenment, and without the direct path to enlightenment you cannot attain Buddhahood, even if you practice lifetime after lifetime for countless *kalpas* [NOTE: a *kalpa* is an extremely long period of time, according to ancient Indian cosmology]. Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime is then impossible. Therefore, when you chant *myoho* and recite *rengé* [chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo], you must summon up deep faith that Myoho-renge-kyo is your life itself.”

- Nichiren’s Buddhism is a profound teaching and by practicing it we are able to achieve our goals in life, control the manifestations and circumstances in our environment, and acquire the life-condition of Buddhahood, or unshakable happiness. It is important to understand, however, the practical application of this practice in our daily lives. It is incorrect to think that chanting by itself, that is

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chanting without making serious efforts to bring about our own human revolution, will be effective. To use a well-known metaphor, that is like expecting a paycheck without working. We must make the causes to reach our goals, not simply wait for them to appear. Nichiren teaches us that though we may have experienced frustration in our lives when our efforts seemingly do not produce the desired effect, summoning faith in the power of Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō will definitely yield great benefit.

- In Nichiren's Buddhism, faith is a dynamic that grows and evolves according to one's efforts. An individual's faith deepens as he or she experiences the benefit and increased fortune of this practice, which is in direct proportion to their sincerity. The effects of chanting Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō are in no way removed from the reality of daily life. That is, all of our experiences within its framework are perfectly natural. As one's faith develops, all things are revealed and an innate understanding of the nature of cause and effect, as well as their relationship to each other, becomes clear.
- President Ikeda states: "Life is filled with countless, endless hardships and struggles. But if we continue to chant Nam-myōhō-renge-kyō, exert ourselves for others' happiness, and make every effort to widely spread the Daishonin's teachings, all those hardships and struggles will shine with boundless and immeasurable wisdom and benefits. In Buddhism, this is the working of the all-important law of cause and effect. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas mentioned in the Lotus Sutra do not merely exist within its pages, nor are they objects of worship or devotion whose images or statues we must pray to. Quite simply, they are human beings; and, more specifically, they are all of you who are striving wholeheartedly for kosen-rufu" (*World Tribune*, 6/18/04, p. 1).

Point 3:

The Nature of One's Life

"You must never think that any of the eighty thousand sacred teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha's lifetime or any of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and their existences are outside yourself. Your practice of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of the sufferings of birth and death in the least unless you perceive the true nature of your life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, then your performing even ten thousand practices and ten thousand good deeds will be in vain. It is like the case of a poor man who spends night and day counting his neighbor's wealth but gains not even half a coin. That is why the T'ien-t'ai school's commentary states, 'Unless one perceives the nature of one's life, one cannot eradicate grave offenses.' This passage implies that, unless one perceives the nature of one's life, one's practice will become an endless, painful austerity. Therefore, such students of Buddhism are condemned as non-Buddhist. *Great Concentration and Insight* [T'ien-tai's greatest writing] states that, although they study Buddhism, their views are no different from those of non-Buddhists."

- In this passage, Nichiren strictly admonishes Toki Jonin to enjoin his Buddhist practice from the standpoint of achieving enlightenment from within himself. In Nichiren's time, the major schools of Buddhism in Japan had lost the power to save people from delusion and their practices had become skewed with the perception that one gained enlightenment only through the auspices of a priest or cleric. In short, Nichiren had to be strict so that he could undo the conventions of religious thought and awaken his followers to the truth: one must perceive the nature of one's life by seeking it from within. He states clearly that no matter how much you chant, if you fail to make this connection, your practice is that of a non-Buddhist.
- Even a superficial examination of the human condition today reveals that the same issues are still present. It is easy to despair and fall into a state of hopelessness, thinking that no matter how hard we try, there is little or nothing we can do to change things. However, as Nichiren points out, this is a "non-Buddhist practice." Though obstacles and delusions assail us, creating the substance of "the sufferings of birth and death," the myriad experiences and triumphs of SGI members is a living testament to the truth of Nichiren's teaching. Our mentor, President Ikeda, has taught us how to practice in exact accord with the true Buddha.

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- President Ikeda states: “The Indian poet and writer Rabindranath Tagore declared, ‘Human welfare is the one object toward which religious enthusiasm has to be directed.’ Religion exists for the sake of human happiness—this is an important truth. It is also the decree and foundation of Nichiren Daishonin and the guiding spirit of Shakyamuni Buddha. The Soka Gakkai practices in exact accord with this fundamental commitment. Any religion that strays from this correct path of working for human happiness is destined ultimately to fall into decline and ruin. Today, the Soka Gakkai shines brightly in the religious world with the radiance of the sun” (*World Tribune*, 5/21/04, p. 1).