

What is Benefit?

When we practice to the Gohonzon with faith, the great life condition of Buddhahood will manifest in the depths of our lives. We can expiate our negative karma from the past and experience it as a lesser effect. We are, at once, able to lessen the heavy suffering, both material and spiritual, that would have manifested in our present life as a result of negative past causes.

What is more, for the practitioner of Nichiren Shoshu, the lesser negative effects can be changed into great benefit. This is called *hendoku iyaku*, the Buddhist term for "changing poison into medicine." No matter how many problems and sufferings may arise, if we muster strong faith and never give up this practice, these situations will be resolved. Moreover, our life condition will open up to a life of greater happiness. This is the Gohonzon's great benefit, changing misfortune into happiness. To state a few examples: poor health can change into good health, poverty can become financial stability, a selfish person can become a person of noble character, and family discord can be transformed into true family happiness.

Thus, by overcoming our sufferings and problems, we are filled with a strong life force and enjoy true fulfillment. The force that impels us to accomplish this is Buddhahood welling up within our hearts as a result of our faith in the Gohonzon. The greatest benefit is the attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form.

The attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form is the life condition symbolized by the four virtues of *Jo*, *Raku*, *Ga*, and *Jo*. *Jo* (eternity) is an indestructible eternal life. *Raku* (happiness) is a feeling of absolute (as opposed to "relative") happiness from enjoyment of living itself. *Ga* (true self) is a strong and harmonious will, undisturbed by any outside influence. *Jo* (purity) is a pure life, unaffected by outside influences.

Conspicuous and Inconspicuous Benefit

By having strong faith in Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism, all people can attain the life condition of absolute happiness, or Buddhahood. As proof, benefit is revealed by the effect of Buddhahood welling up inside the life of the believer. The emergence of the great power of benefit from the Gohonzon will provide absolute proof, leaving no room for doubt.

In Nichiren Daishonin's words:

Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle? It is written that those who embrace the Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra will be protected by Kishimojin and her ten daughters. They will enjoy the happiness of Aizen and the good fortune of Bishamon. Wherever your daughter may frolic or play, no harm will come to her; she will be free from fear like the lion king.

(MW, Vol. 1, p. 119; Goshō, p. 685)

There are two kinds of benefit: conspicuous and inconspicuous. In the Latter Day of the Law, inconspicuous benefit is most important. Conspicuous benefit is an obvious realization of our prayers. But the greater benefit is inconspicuous benefit, which appears gradually over time.

As one accepts and embraces the Gohonzon, and strives in faith, various conspicuous benefits will often be experienced in accordance with the time and the situation, such as the benefit for the beginner in faith, the protection of the Shoten Zenjin when one is facing a problem that needs to be solved, or when one's life or livelihood is on the edge. These conspicuous benefits are but a small part of the benefit from the Gohonzon in comparison to inconspicuous benefits.

By experiencing the benefit of the Gohonzon, one can be firmly convinced of achieving the life condition of "attaining Buddhahood in one's present form," which is the greatest of all inconspicuous benefits, and is the purpose of our faith.