

The Gantan [New Year] Gongyo

New Year's Day has been celebrated in various ways since ancient times and marks the renewal of a person's determination to open the way happiness. In the Goshō, "Reply to Akimoto" (Akimoto Dono Gohenji), Nichiren Daishonin states:

In considering the order of the five seasonal festivals, we find that they correspond respectively to the five characters of Myōhō-Renge-Kyō. New Year's Day celebrates the character Myō. (Shinpen, p. 334)

Myōhō-Renge-Kyō is the ultimate Law that activates the original energy of all life and existence. The Muryōgi Sutra (Sutra of Infinite Meaning) states that, "All phenomena are derived from the one Law." Our lives are based on the ultimate truth of Myōhō-Renge-Kyō, whether we know it or not. Therefore, when we correctly carry out the practice of Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō, we are making the fundamental cause for unshakeable happiness to grow within our lives.

The Law of Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō was revealed by Nichiren Daishonin, the True Buddha in the Latter Day of the Law, who possesses the complete understanding of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra. The Daishonin was the person who actualized the True Law within his life as the True Buddha. All people can attain enlightenment when they fuse with the life of the True Buddha by chanting Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō to the Gohonzon.

Nichiren Daishonin states:

New Year's Day marks the first day, the first month, the beginning of the year and the start of spring. A person who celebrates this day will gain virtue and be loved by all, just as the moon becomes full gradually, moving from west to east, and the sun shines more brightly traveling from east to west. (Shinpen, p. 1551; M.W., Vol. 1, p. 271)

Nichiren Daishonin also states, "To accept is easy; to continue is difficult but Buddhahood lies in continuing faith." (Shinpen, p. 775; M.W., Vol. 1, p. 127)

Keeping correct faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism with the fresh spirit of one's new year determination is the only way to accumulate great benefit and to achieve great results from one's efforts.

In the Goshō, "The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra," Nichiren Daishonin states, "'Myō' means to revive, that is, to return to life." (Shinpen, p. 360; M.W., Vol. 3, p. 23) The Chinese character "Myō" of Myōhō-Renge-Kyō contains many profound meanings and this profundity characterizes Myōhō-Renge-Kyō. Myōhō has the function of revitalizing the ineffectual teachings of provisional Buddhas. When we believe in and carry out the practice of chanting Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō, our lives, which have been poisoned by provisional teachings and negative karma, will change into lives of enlightenment. In Buddhism, the word "revive" means to change our evil nature into a higher life-condition and to attain Buddhahood.

Making determinations and chanting Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō indicates the significance of New Year's Day. Even though one may be dressed in beautiful clothes and filled with determination for the new year, without chanting

Daimoku, determinations will be short-lived and self-centered. When the festivities are over, one simply returns to a world of delusion and old problems.

In the strictest sense, a genuine New Year's Day Ceremony is carried out only by Nichiren Shoshu priests and believers who are sincerely practicing to the Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws. We, who bask in the benefit of the True Buddha's mercy, should recognize New Year's Gongyo as a most profound and auspicious ceremony that encompasses the meaning of the True Buddha's enlightenment of Kuon-ganjo (time without beginning, or eternity).

As Nichiren Shoshu believers, we should put New Year's Gongyo first, before other activities. By performing a vigorous first Gongyo of the year, we become determined to maintain sincere, steadfast faith. We should also strive to develop a confident practice for ourselves and others throughout the year.

Each year the High Priest performs a solemn New Year's Gongyo with priests and believers at the Head Temple, Taisekiji. Through this ceremony, they are able to show their heartfelt appreciation to the Three Treasures of Nichiren Shoshu and pray for worldwide propagation, world peace, and happiness for all humankind. Following Gongyo, the High Priest gives warm guidance to all believers, and each participant receives a cup of sak • from the offerings made to the Dai-Gohonzon. Each local temple also conducts New Year's Gongyo following the Nichiren Shoshu tradition of celebrating New Year's Day.