

The Koshi-e Ceremony

The Koshi-e Ceremony is conducted at the Head Temple Taisekiji on February 7, the memorial date of Nikko Shonin's death. Local Nichiren Shoshu Temples honor this ceremony also, but usually at a convenient date nearest to the 7th.

Nikko Shonin was the only one among Nichiren Daishonin's senior disciples who was capable of directly receiving the Lifeblood of the Law as the Second High Priest. His total dedication to the Daishonin and spirit to preserve his true teachings for future generations have become the eternal foundation of Nichiren Shoshu.

Among the Three Treasures, we respect Nikko Shonin as the first among the Treasure of the Priest because his efforts made it possible for us to encounter the True Law in this present age. Participation in this ceremony shows our appreciation to Nikko Shonin and our determination to follow his spirit in accurately preserving the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin for posterity.

Each year priests of the Head Temple go to the Shojin River to gather dropworts, a fern-like plant, which, together with the memorial tablet, they offer to the Gohonzon. Nikko Shonin led a very austere lifestyle and enjoyed eating dropworts, so this offering is reminiscent of his life. This Nichiren Shoshu tradition has been followed for more than 600 years.

Nikko Shonin was born on March 8, 1246, at Kajikazawa in Koma District of Kai Province, the present Yamanashi Prefecture in Japan. Because his father died when he was a child and his mother remarried into another family, he was raised by his maternal grandfather. At the age of seven, he entered Shijuku-in, a Tendai Temple in Suruga Province, to receive his education. In addition to the Tendai doctrine, he studied many subjects demonstrating a unique aptitude for Japanese and Chinese literature, poetry and calligraphy.

In 1258, Nichiren Daishonin visited Jisso-ji Temple which was closely affiliated with Shijuku-in, to do research in its sutra repository. Nikko Shonin, who was then thirteen years old, had an opportunity to serve the Daishonin. Nikko Shonin was deeply moved by the Daishonin's noble character and, in response to their karmic relationship from the past, became the Daishonin's disciple receiving the name Hoki-bo Nikko.

Less than three years later, Nichiren Daishonin remonstrated with the Kamakura government through his treatise "On Securing the Peace of the Land Through the Propagation of True Buddhism" (Rissho Ankoku Ron). The government and other Buddhist priests were so angered that they banished the Daishonin to exile on the Izu Peninsula. When Nikko Shonin learned of the exile, he set out for Izu on foot in order to join his master. From that time on, he was Nichiren Daishonin's close disciple. He was responsible for converting many priests and lay people from other Buddhist schools. Later, he once again followed the Daishonin into exile, this time to Sado Island where he endured numerous hardships with him.

Through his devoted service, sparing no pain in his efforts to support the Daishonin and the struggle for propagation,

Nikko Shonin developed an incomparable understanding of the depth and truth of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

His vigorous propagation efforts centered in the Kai, Suruga, Izu, and Totomi areas, where he developed countless strong believers. As the number of converts increased, so did the pressure on the Daishonin's followers culminating in the most tragic incident of martyrdom in Nichiren Shoshu history, the Atsuhara Persecution. But due to Nikko Shonin's leadership for Kosen-rufu, the Atsuhara believers had developed the unshakable faith to chant Daimoku despite the threat of death.

Nichiren Daishonin recognized Nikko Shonin's accomplishments and his profound understanding of True Buddhism. Seeing that his own death was approaching, the Daishonin designated Nikko Shonin as his successor in two different transfer documents. One was written at Mount Minobu in September 1282, transmitting the Lifeblood of the Law to Nikko, and the other in which he entrusted Kuon-ji Temple at Minobu to Nikko Shonin's leadership was written at the Ikegami residence on the day of his death, October 13, 1282.

After the Daishonin's death, the other five senior priests failed to support Nikko Shonin as the legitimate successor to his teachings. They all left Minobu to return to their respective areas. As none of the five priests shared Nikko Shonin's depth of understanding of the true teaching, it was only a matter of time before they compromised the Daishonin's Buddhism by mixing it with elements of other popular teachings. This made it easier for them to survive in a time when provisional and incorrect forms of Buddhism prevailed. They did not understand that their inability to remain true to their master's teaching was an act of slander against the Daishonin himself. They eventually lost sight of the prime point of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and declared themselves to be priests of the Tendai sect. During this period, Nikko Shonin stayed at Kuon-ji Temple in Minobu and upheld the orthodoxy of the Daishonin's teaching.

Niko, one of the five senior priests, returned to Minobu around 1285, and Nikko Shonin appointed him chief instructor of priests. But in time, Niko allowed Hagiri Sanenaga, the lord of the Minobu area, to commit many acts flagrantly contradictory to the Daishonin's teachings. Nikko Shonin repeatedly warned Niko and Sanenaga about their slanderous behavior, but to no avail.

In 1289, feeling that he could no longer protect the Daishonin's teachings at Minobu, Nikko Shonin sorrowfully decided to leave Minobu taking the Dai-Gohonzon, the Daishonin's ashes and other treasures with him. This was an expression of his conviction as the one person who could protect and realize the purpose of True Buddhism.

Within the next year Nikko Shonin moved to the Fuji area, due to the great support of Nanjo Tokimitsu, where he established the foundation of the Head Temple of Nichiren Shoshu, Taisekiji, as the center for Kosen-rufu. The establishment of Taisekiji at Mount Fuji was in accordance with Nichiren Daishonin's will and was essential in order to provide a sanctuary (kaidan) in keeping with the Three Great Secret Laws of True Buddhism.

Nikko Shonin dedicated the rest of his life to nurturing his disciples, collecting the Daishonin's writings for propagation purposes and remonstrating with the Japanese sovereign for the sake of future generations. He later entrusted Taisekiji to his successor, Nichimoku Shonin, while he stayed in nearby Omosu and founded a seminary for

the training of priests.

Nikko Shonin passed away peacefully at the age of eighty-eight on February 7, 1333, at Omosu Seminary.

The Koshi-e Ceremony provides a way by which we, in harmonious unity of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and laity, can show appreciation to Nikko Shonin for his tenacious spirit to attain Kosen-rufu.