

## The Risshu-e Ceremony

In the early morning of April 28, 1253, Nichiren Daishonin, age 32, stood alone in Kasagamori forest at the top of Seicho-zan Mountain waiting for dawn. As the sun rose above the Pacific Ocean, Nichiren Daishonin joined his hands in prayer and began to chant the Daimoku: "Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo..."

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN

Zennichi-marō entered the priesthood at Seicho-ji Temple in Awa Province (now Chiba Prefecture) when he was twelve years old. He studied hard under his master Dozen-bo and excelled. As an acolyte, he had prayed to Kokuzo, the bodhisattva who represents the wisdom of the universe, to become the wisest priest in all of Japan. At the age of sixteen, he was formally ordained and given the name Zesho-bo Rencho. He moved to Kamakura to further his studies and for more than a decade, he assiduously researched Buddhist doctrines at centers such as Kyoto and Nara.

Young Zesho-bo Rancho found the answers he had been seeking and confidently came to understand that the root of all people's suffering is their faith in inferior, powerless, heretical teachings. He realized that the only true teaching in the Latter Day of the Law was Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo hidden in the depths of the Juryo chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

Zesho-bo Rencho began to realize that he was born with the mission of Bodhisattva Jogyo, who was predicted in the Lotus Sutra to propagate the True Law of the Latter Day. He also realized that to denounce the misconceptions of the prevailing sects would certainly begin a life of persecutions as was also predicted in the Lotus Sutra.

On April 28, 1253, Zesho-bo Rencho renamed himself Nichiren (Sun Lotus). He then entered the Seicho-ji Temple where priests and believers had gathered to hear his first sermon. He was already known as one accomplished in both practice and study of Buddhism. They waited for him in Jibutsudo Hall. He began his first sermon to establish True Buddhism. His clear voice resounded throughout the hall, easily winning over and influencing his audience through his righteous bearing, fluent speech, and tremendous knowledge. But as his sermon progressed, the attitude of those in the hall changed, first to surprise and then to intense hostility.

In that sermon, the Daishonin carefully clarified the characteristics of those living in the Latter Day of the Law, and told them that Shakyamuni's Buddhism no longer held any power to relieve their suffering. He further uncompromisingly declared that all of the other Buddhist sects propagated at that time could not help them. He indicted Nembutsu as a teaching that would cause people to fall into a state of hell. He especially condemned the teachings of Zen Buddhism as a devilish source of trouble. He thus explained why there was confusion in society, upheaval and disintegration of the public order, why the hearts of the people were demoralized, and the country plagued by natural disasters. Nichiren Daishonin told them that these conditions were caused by faith and practice of heretical religions. Because he knew that only Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo was able to save people in the Latter Day of the Law, the Daishonin admonished them to give up Nembutsu, Zen, and other provisional teachings immediately and to take faith in the True Law of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

A steward of the area, Tojo Kagenobu, who was a confirmed Nembutsu believer became furious after hearing this and ordered his warrior to arrest the Daishonin. Nichiren Daishonin managed to narrowly escape with the help of two of his seniors, Joken-bo and Gijo-bo. After converting his parents and giving them the Buddhist names Myonichi to his father and Myoren to his mother, he headed for Kamakura to launch his lifelong propagation activities.

#### THE POWER AND THE COMPASSION OF NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO

During his lifetime, Tojo Kagenobu, whose ignorance of the meaning of the Daishonin's sermon turned to hatred and anger, fell into a hellish life condition. He is said to have died in a fit of mental anguish. Nonetheless, due to the absolute compassion that characterizes the Mystic Law, even this kind of negative relationship to the Daishonin's teachings can be a cause through which one will eventually be able to attain enlightenment. In other words, according to the power and compassion of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, the Buddhism of Sowing, people who slander, like Kagenobu, must fall into hell once in their lifetime. They do, however, find their way to True Buddhism through their negative connection to it. This is the way and power of the Law encompassed by the Daishonin's Buddhism.

The Daishonin's declaration and establishment of True Buddhism encompasses all believers and slanderers and both good and evil. The ultimate significance of the Daishonin's declaration lies in the fact that the seed of enlightenment, the Mystic Law, was sown for all humankind and the entire universe.

The Daishonin's absolute mercy, the essence of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, is capable of permeating all lands, people, and the five components of life: form, perception, conception, volition, and consciousness. Thus by voicing the Mystic Law on April 28, 1253, the seed was sown for these three realms of existence to become the manifestation of enlightenment. The Mystic Law is absolute and not dependent upon the awareness of the people, be they believers or slanderers.

The significance of the annual Risshu-e Ceremony is to express our gratitude to Nichiren Daishonin. Through his profound mercy, he overcame tremendous obstacles to establish True Buddhism for all eternity. So we commemorate this day by making the determination to follow the Daishonin's example of teaching everyone about Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.