

The Offering of the Law And The Offering of Material Treasures (*Ho-kuyo* and *zai-kuyo*)

During the lifetime of our master Nichiren Daishonin, the believers delivered various Gokuyo offerings to him. Throughout several Goshos, we can see that Nichiren Daishonin expressed his profound appreciation to each of them for their sincere ambition.

Presenting Gokuyo refers to making sincere offerings from our heart, out of respect for the three treasures of the Buddha, the Law, and the priesthood. It is one of our important Buddhist practices.

Today, in the Latter Day of the Law, we revere the three treasures of the Buddhism of sowing, hidden in the depths of the sutra. They are the treasure of the Buddha—Nichiren Daishonin; the treasure of the Law—the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching; and the treasure of the priesthood, which refers to the Second High Priest Nikko Shonin and all the successive High Priests.

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the *Letter to Ni'ike* (Ni'ike gosho):

As evidence of one's true understanding of Buddhism, he should respect the priest, revere the Law, and present offerings to the Buddha.

(*Gosho*, p. 1461)

Here, the Daishonin explains the importance of offering Gokuyo to the three treasures of the Buddha, the Law, and the priesthood.

Why, then, is offering Gokuyo important in our Buddhist practice? Fundamentally, to have faith is to uphold "*namu*," which means, "to devote ourselves." Nichiren Daishonin explains the following in *An Offering of Polished Rice* (Hakumai ippyo gosho):

Sincere devotion (*kimyō*) is to offer one's life to the Buddha.

(*Gosho*, p. 1544)

The fundamental significance of faith lies in our willingness to offer our lives to the Buddha. In the same Gosho, the Daishonin continues:

Whether or not one possesses the treasures, there is no treasure more precious than one's life. That is why sages and wise men in the past have offered their lives to the Buddha and thereby attained enlightenment. (ibid.)

As the Daishonin explains in the above passage, in the Buddhist sutras, there are numerous descriptions of Buddhist practices carried out in the past by sage and wise men who offered their lives for the sake of attaining enlightenment.

The sutras also contain descriptions of the various practices performed by Shakyamuni in his past lifetimes.

In the Nirvana Sutra (*Nehan-gyo*), there is the story about him in a past lifetime when he was carrying out Buddhist practices as Sessen Doji. At that time, he was willing to give his body to feed

a hungry demon in exchange for learning the Buddha's teachings.

The Devadatta (*Daibadatta*; twelfth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra tells the story of Shakyamuni in a previous lifetime as King Suzudan (*Danno*). He devoted himself to practicing austerities, as he served the hermit-sage Ashi for 1,000 years in his search to find the true teaching.

Furthermore, in the *Treatise on the Great Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom*, there is the story of Shakyamuni in his past lifetime as Gyobo Bonji (Aspiration for the Law). He was willing to peel off his own skin to use as paper to transcribe a verse of the Buddha's teaching. Furthermore, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (*Fukyō*), who risked his life to perform the practice of venerating others, appears in the Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (*Fukyō*; twentieth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. These all illustrate the causal practices from previous lifetimes performed by Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment by offering his life to Buddhism.

The Bodhisattva Medicine King (*Yakuo bosatsu*; twenty-third) chapter of the Lotus Sutra contains a description of Bodhisattva Medicine King (*Yakuo bosatsu*), who, in a previous lifetime, desired to make an offering to the Buddha Nichigatsu Jomyotoku who had expounded the Lotus Sutra. He offered light to the Buddha by burning his elbows for 72,000 years.

In all these examples, we find that saints and sages of olden times, in search of the Law, offered their physical bodies to the Buddha.

However, these practices performed by sages and wise men in the distant past, during the eras of the Buddhism of the maturing and the harvest, are not applicable today in our practice as common mortals who uphold the Buddhism of the sowing in the Latter Day of the Law.

In the Gosho, *An Offering of Polished Rice* (Hakumai ippyo gosho):

Nichiren Daishonin states:

The benefits received for this dedication will be no less than those received by Bodhisattva Medicine King, who burned his elbow as an offering, and Sessen Doji, who hurled his own flesh for the demon to eat. Thus, the offerings by sage took the form of offerings in actuality (*ji-kuyo*) [material life itself], while those by common mortals constitute offerings in principle (*ri-kuyo*) [the sincerity of giving].

(*Gosho*, p. 1545)

Offerings in actuality (*ji-kuyo*) refer to the practice of seeking the Law through giving one's own life and body, as in the case of Bodhisattva Medicine King and Sessen Doji. By contrast, we, as common mortals in the Latter Day of the Law, present offerings in principle (*ri-kuyo*). The Daishonin teaches that the benefits obtained by doing it are in no way inferior to the benefits received by the sages of ancient times for their offerings in actuality.

What, then, is the nature of offerings in principle, which we practice as common mortals in the Latter Day of the Law? This is explained in *An Offering of Polished Rice* (Hakumai ippyo gosho):

Common mortals can attain Buddhahood through sincere determination.

(*Gosho*, p. 1544)

We, as common mortals in the Latter Day of the Law, can attain enlightenment by sincerely making offerings to the three treasures. Offerings in principle refer to both giving material offerings

The offering of the Law is reverence for the Buddha's teachings, based on propagating true Buddhism according to the doctrines of the sutras, teaching the people, and enabling them to gain benefits. We must chant sincere Daimoku, based on the spirit of "not begrudging our lives" (*fuji shaku shinmyo*). Furthermore, we must uphold the golden words of Nichiren Daishonin and the directions of our High Priest. And we must exert ourselves to do shakubuku, without being intimidated in any way, regardless of what difficulties may arise. This characterizes the offering of the Law (*hō-kuyo*).

Moreover, even if our time is limited, we should visit the temple and engage in various activities for faith, such as attending the ceremonies and various meetings. This will show our sincere devotion, as we offer our lives to the Buddha. Also, we should attend discussion meetings with fellow Hokkeko believers and share the joyful experiences of our benefits from the Gohonzon. Sharing the joy of our faith and practice also constitutes the offering of the Law.

The second form of offering in principle is making offerings of material goods, such as finances, food, and clothing to the three treasures of the Buddhism of the sowing. Through this offering of material goods (*zai-kuyo*), we can protect and sustain the lamp of the Law of true Buddhism. This will enable all people to correctly uphold their Buddhist practice and ultimately attain enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the *Letter of Condolence to Ni'ike* (Ni'ike dono go-shosoku):

The benefits of making offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra are greater than those from presenting offerings to countless Buddhas.

(*Gosho*, p. 1363)

Here, the Daishonin reveals that tremendous benefits can be gained from making sincere offerings of material goods.

The *Gosho, An Offering of Polished Rice*, contains instructions on the spirit we must uphold in order to attain Buddhahood. For example, the Daishonin teaches that, if we have only one piece of clothing to help us endure the cold, our sincerity in offering that single piece of clothing is, indeed, the spirit of sincerely offering material goods.

Let us say that we had only one piece of food to enable us to survive today. The Daishonin instructs that offering that essential piece of food to the Buddha represents the spirit of the offering of material goods that will enable a common mortal to transform himself into a Buddha. He states that this very spirit will bring us benefits "no less than those received by Bodhisattva Medicine King, who burned his elbow as an offering, and Sessen Doji who hurled his own body for the demon to eat."

During the lifetime of Nichiren Daishonin, Funamori Yasaburo attended to him during his exile to Izu. When he was exiled to Sado, Abutsubo and his wife served him. They all risked danger to their own lives by making Gokuyo offerings of food and other materials to sustain Nichiren Daishonin's life. Furthermore, they were dedicated in their service to him.

The Nanjo clan in the Ueno region of Fuji experienced great persecutions and oppression from the feudal government of Kamakura, which was intent on obstructing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Although Nanjo Tokimitsu was the steward of the region, he suffered from such stringent financial conditions that he could not even afford a horse on which to ride. Even so, he continued to send Gokuyo offerings regularly to Nichiren Daishonin.

Thanks to our predecessors, who sincerely and thoroughly protected and supported the three treasures of the Buddhism of the sowing, we are able to reap the benefits of their efforts today and

exist as Hokkeko believers. We are the ones who now are tasked with receiving and continuing this pure lineage of constantly upholding the spirit to protect and support true Buddhism. It is essential for us to present sincere Gokuyo offerings to the Gohonzon at the Head Temple and at our local temples. Through this material offering, the lamp of the true Law of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism can be protected. Furthermore, the spirit of everyone in Nichiren Shoshu will be enriched and the prosperity of the temples will rise, and this will enable many people to experience the benefits of the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching.

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the *Letter to Ni'ike* (Ni'ike gosho):

Your frequent Gokuyo offerings to me will repay your debts of gratitude to the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni. Exert forth ever more effort and do not succumb to lethargy.

(*Gosho*, p. 1457)

Presenting Gokuyo offerings represents the repayment of our debts of gratitude, and we will continue to perform this practice throughout our lifetime. Therefore, it must not cause unreasonable strain. The essence of the Gokuyo offering is to present your sincere spirit to the Buddha. Therefore, we must not be preoccupied with the contents or quantity of the offerings. We must be always aware and mindful of the spirit of offering Gokuyo. The sincerity behind the offerings is most important.

Furthermore, in our daily service to the Gohonzon, we must keep the altar area neat and clean. We must be sure to offer water and greens and burn incense during Gongyo and Shodai every morning and evening. We should light the altar with candles or other forms of light, and we can make offerings of cooked rice and other foods. These are all offerings of material goods. Let us all present these offerings to the Gohonzon with a truly sincere spirit.

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in *Reply to Matsuno* (Matsuno-dono gohenji):

It is essential for you, as a lay believer, to single-mindedly chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and also make offerings to the priests. Furthermore, in order to practice exactly as the [Lotus] Sutra teaches, you must propagate the Law to the full extent of your ability.

(*Gosho*, p. 1051)

Here, the Daishonin teaches us the fundamental attitude that we must uphold in our faith. Let's follow these instructions in our daily lives and single-mindedly chant Daimoku and offer our sincere Gokuyo to the Gohonzon, which represents the tangible form of the True Buddha Nichiren Daishonin.

Furthermore, let's exert our utmost efforts every day, as we strive to do our best in shakubuku to propagate true Buddhism. Let's advance in our practice for ourselves and for others, as we proceed toward the achievement of our goal to establish a Hokkeko organization of 800,000 believers by 2021, when we will celebrate the 800th anniversary of the advent of our Founder, Nichiren Daishonin. This constitutes our true offerings of both material treasures and the Law. Let us put this into action and accumulate tremendous benefits.