

Meaning of *Oeshiki* Ceremony and Shakubuku and Ikusei

1, October 13th marks the anniversary of Nichiren Daishonin's entry into nirvana. The ceremony offering gratitude to the Daishonin on this occasion is called the *Oeshiki*. At the Head Temple, there is a special ceremony held called the *Gotai-e*. In society at large, the anniversary of the passing of great individuals and sages is usually honored with memorial services, in which people fondly remember and praise the deceased. The significance of the *Oeshiki* Ceremony in Nichiren Shoshu is completely different. The meaning of the *Oeshiki* Ceremony is truly profound.

The verse section of the Life Span (*Juryō*; sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra contains the following passage:

In order to save living beings, as an expedient means I appear to enter nirvana but in truth I do not pass into extinction.(*Hokekyo*, p. 439; *The Lotus Sutra*, Watson, p. 229)

Although the Buddha's life is eternal, he appears to enter into nirvana in order to cause all people to overcome their idle nature and to nurture their seeking spirit, so that he can lead them all to enlightenment. In the same way, Nichiren Daishonin's entry into nirvana is characterized by extinction that actually is not extinction. It is the manifestation of the aspect of non-extinction within extinction.

In Nichiren Shoshu, the *Oeshiki* Ceremony is an expression of gratitude for Nichiren Daishonin on the day of his passing, when he manifested his extinction that actually was not his extinction. It is the ceremony that celebrates the advent of the True Buddha Nichiren Daishonin in the Latter Day of the Law, who constantly resides in this *saha* world to preach the Law and to teach all mankind.

2, Since the *Oeshiki* is the most important ceremony of the year, off course, offering to the Gohonzon is very important, in addition , there is a great deal of work to be done in preparation. We must try our best to help as much as possible in preparing for this ceremony. It is not enough for us simply to attend.

For example, while we ordinarily offer only evergreens on the altar, we add ornamental cherry blossoms on this occasion. The significance of these cherry blossoms is to show that, at the time of Nichiren Daishonin's entry into nirvana, the ground shook and the cherry blossoms bloomed out of season, even though it was autumn. Making each of these ornamental blossoms to decorate the altar is extremely helpful, and it shows our sense of gratitude toward the Daishonin.

We must inform as many people as possible about this ceremony and invite them to attend. We can volunteer to clean the temple in advance. We can sincerely pray during

our morning and evening Gongyo to be able to attend the ceremony. We must not stand by idly and wait for the day of the *Oeshiki* Ceremony. It is important to mentally prepare ourselves for this great event.

- 3, In the One Hundred and Six Articles (Hyaku rokka-shō), Nichiren Daishonin states:
The Law does not spread by itself. Since a person propagates it, both the person and the Law are equally revered.(Gosho, p. 1687)

The Buddhism of the sowing is the great, direct path to true happiness that will enable us to attain enlightenment. It only can be practiced and propagated by the people. True Buddhism will never spread if the people do nothing to promote it. And the only way to propagate the true Buddhism of the sowing is through shakubuku. Thus, those who do shakubuku are the people who propagate true Buddhism, and they are as precious as Buddhism itself.

Furthermore, it is essential for us not only to exert our efforts to do shakubuku, but also to cultivate many people in our environment who will do shakubuku themselves.

We can understand the importance of teaching people about the benefits of the Gohonzon and also for both us and others to receive benefits. However, if we do shakubuku and lead others to receive Gojukai, but we run away and teach them nothing, they will never learn the importance of sustaining true faith and practice. They eventually will accumulate negative karma by committing slander and will receive the effects of great suffering. This truly would be a lack of compassion on our part. In order to lead all Hokkeko members to the correct practice, we must sincerely teach each one of them about faith and the practice for ourselves and for others (jigyō keta).

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin gives the following guidance about the attitude that we must foster in this endeavor:

When we do shakubuku, it is important for us to cultivate the person, so that he, himself, also will be able to do shakubuku. It truly is a lack of compassion and the epitome of irresponsibility if we do shakubuku to someone but do not teach him anything. For the future achievement of kōsen-rufu, it is essential that the people we do shakubuku become capable, themselves, of doing shakubuku. They must grow into individuals who fight for the achievement of kōsen-rufu. If we neglect to do this, the Hokkeko will decline. Indeed, both shakubuku and cultivation are the practices for others. Needless to say, the practice for ourselves is to do Gongyō and chant Daimoku, and the practice for others is shakubuku and cultivation. Our practice will be lopsided if either is lacking. Under such conditions, it would be impossible to develop a strong Hokkeko organization. Moreover, we would be unable to accomplish any significant objectives.

(Collected Sermons of High Priest Nichinyo Shonin [Goshinan-shū], Vol. 10, p. 85)

Here, the High Priest provides us with directions on the importance of cultivating believers to enable them to do shakubuku. Those who are able to do shakubuku are people who, themselves, put forth their utmost efforts to do Gongyō and chant Daimoku every day, to attend the Okō Ceremonies at their local temple, and to participate in the various temple activities and ceremonies.

After people receive Gojukai, we need to considerably teach them many details of faith and practice. We must cultivate these new believers so that they become individuals for the sake of kōsen-rufu. The word “cultivation” has many meanings. Among them, the most important is to “develop individuals who can accomplish shakubuku successfully.”

- 4, How, then, should we cultivate people who can accomplish shakubuku? The sponsor (the “parent” in faith who introduced Buddhism to the new believer) and other Hokkeko members should be mindful of the following seven points in order to encourage the new believers:
1. Ask to the new believers: “Would you like to tell others about the joy of having been able to embrace this faith?”
 2. Ask the name of the person with whom the new believers wish to share this Buddhism—the person, into whose life, the new believers wish to sow the seed of true Buddhism.
 3. Go together with the new Hokkeko believer to visit the person with whom this Buddhism will be shared.
 4. When we visit the person to shakubuku, we (the sponsor) should do the shakubuku so that the new believer can watch us.
 5. After a few such occasions, the new Hokkeko believer will feel comfortable about doing shakubuku himself.
 6. There are times when, while doing shakubuku, we are made to feel unpleasant or embarrassed, but when we are successful for our effort of shakubuku, we will feel the joy that someone has understood the significance of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings and that we have successfully served the Gohonzon.
 7. We gain confidence when we are successful in doing shakubuku.

(2016 Hokkeko Summer Study Meeting for Japanese Hokkeko Text, pp. 40-41)

Furthermore, the sponsors who do shakubuku and the other Hokkeko believers need to be mindful of cultivating talent and doing the following with the new believers:

1. Always keep in touch with them.
2. Always do activities with them (chant Daimoku, do shakubuku, and go on home visits together).
3. Have them learn from you at the locations where you practice. (2016 Hokkeko Summer Study Meeting for Japanese Hokkeko Text, page 41)

- 5, The Nichiren Shoshu temples and propagation centers have been established in various countries where conditions are vastly different. Therefore, it is important to heed the situations existing in each country and exert great propagation efforts. Given these circumstances, the chief priests in each country are sincerely following the directions of the High Priest, based on the guidance of the Overseas Department.**

All the believers who are associated with these temples and propagation centers should follow the guidance and directions of their chief priests, who are the guiding priests and the direct masters for their faith and practice. They all must form a solid unity, based on different bodies but one mind (itai doshin) and advance together with devotion.

The Nichiren Shoshu Hokkeko must not be an organization where individuals, insist that their personal views are correct and try to pull everyone in the direction of their own, individual thinking. Arbitrary thoughts and views are neither the spirit of the True Buddha Nichiren Daishonin nor the path to enlightenment. In fact, they are none other than a precarious way that will lead us into the three evil paths.

The absolute core of the Nichiren Shoshu Hokkeko must be the golden words of Nichiren Daishonin and the directions of the successive High Priests. It is an organization with a great mission to move towards achievement of the tremendous objective of kōsen-rufu, by forming a solid unity between the priests and lay believers, based on the spirit of different bodies but one mind.

When shakubuku and cultivation are carried out as the practice for others, and we advance toward the achievement of kōsen-rufu, obstacles and devils will certainly appear and vie with one another to prevent our progress. This is just as Nichiren Daishonin predicted in his golden words. Therefore, it is important never to skip the performance of Gongyō and Daimoku, as we do shakubuku and cultivate people of talent.

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the Orally Transmitted Teachings (Ongi kuden):

Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is the greatest of all great joys. (Gosho, p. 1801)

Let us bring forth great joy through chanting Daimoku, and let's overcome all obstacles in our way, as we advance in our efforts to do shakubuku and cultivate individuals. Without fail, as we progress toward our objective of establishing a Hokkeko organization of 800,000 believers by 2021, for the 800th anniversary of the advent of our Founder, Nichiren Daishonin. Thank you very much for coming today.