

The Significance of Passing Down the Faith to Our Progeny (*Hottō sōzoku*)

Passing down the faith to our progeny (*hottō sōzoku*) is the process of correctly transmitting the faith that we practice to our children.

However assiduously we may practice our faith, if we are unable to hand it down to our offspring, the lamp of true Buddhism in our families will eventually go out. The correct procedure of making memorial offerings for the deceased will cease, and the achievement of *kōsen-rufu* will increasingly grow distant.

Therefore, it is extremely important for us to teach our young children to foster a deep sense of gratitude to the Gohonzon. Whenever you can and as much as possible, you should find opportunities to take them to meetings at the temples and propagation centers, so that they come in contact with the Buddha and strengthen their karmic relationship with true Buddhism. When we see children at the temple and at local meetings, we should acknowledge them, praise them, and make a concerted effort to promote their growth.

The recent trend in child-rearing is minimal interference by parents in the lives of their children. The parents' behavior apparently is based on their deep reverence for the sanctity of the personality of their children. Although this may sound harsh, there was never a time when people looked favorably upon raising children by leaving them unchecked and unbridled and always letting them do as they please.

Under such conditions, it is impossible to properly discipline them. There are some people who say that it is unnecessary to teach children about true Buddhism until they are old enough to make their own judgments.

However, this idea truly lacks compassion and is none other than the abandonment of responsibility by the parents. In fact, it is only natural for parents to directly transmit to their children the joy they have attained from upholding true Buddhism.

The "Parable of the Skilled Physician," expounded in the Lotus Sutra, addresses the way in which parents should raise and lead their children.

Once there was an excellent physician who had many children. While he was away from home, the children mistakenly drank a poison. When the physician father returned home, his children were writhing in agony. The physician quickly mixed together a potent medicine and tried to make his children drink it. The children were delirious from the poison they had consumed, and they refused to drink the good medicine. The father thought of a plan. He told the children, "I am going to leave this

good medicine right here. Make certain that you drink it and cure yourself of the suffering caused by the poison.” So saying, he left the home. Then, he sent a messenger to tell the children, “Your father died during his travel.” Hearing this, the children were shocked. Realizing that they no longer had anyone on whom they could depend, they were truly sad. Finally, they remembered the good medicine that their father left for them and quickly drank it. The medicine was effective and the children all recovered from the agony caused by the poison they had drunk. They were able to regain their good health. Just then, the father returned home, and they all rejoiced.

In this parable, the skilled physician actually represents the Buddha. The numerous children refer to us, the people of the world, who are all steeped in the five desires (*go yoku*). The Buddha, determined to save the people from their suffering, expounds the teaching of Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

However, the people do not listen. At this point, the Buddha uses clever expedient means to cause the people to focus on faith in true Buddhism. This is represented by the “Parable of the Skilled Physician.”

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in *Reply to Sennichi ama* (Sennichi ama-gohenji):
There is a sutra that states that children are your enemies....There is another sutra which states that children are your treasure. (*Gosho*, p. 1476)

Depending on the way in which children are raised, they can become their parents’ enemies, or they can become precious treasures for them.

A passage from *Letter to Jakunichi-bō* (Jakunichi bō-gosho) reads:
It definitely is karmic destiny that they are the parents and I have been born as their child. (*Gosho*, p. 1393)

The relationship between parent and child is never happenstance. We must be firmly aware that the children are connected to the parents by a deep karmic relationship from their previous lives.

In our current capacity, we definitely can bring salvation to ourselves by praying to attain enlightenment in our present lifetime, and by exerting our utmost efforts in our practice for ourselves and for others, and striving to pass down our faith to our progeny.

Furthermore, we can effectively bring salvation in the future by raising our children and grandchildren to become fine individuals and instilling in them the importance of upholding our faith and practice. Additionally, if after our death, our children and grandchildren continue to offer memorial prayers for us, based on the true teaching, we will be able to manifest enlightenment in death.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin presented us with the following guidance:

You should respectfully protect the faith that you have inherited from your parents, believe in the Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of true Buddhism, assiduously strive forth in your practice for yourself and for others, be mindful of achieving solid harmony in your family, and sincerely uphold your practice. By so doing, you can receive immeasurably great benefits and repay your debts of gratitude to your parents. At the same time, when you pass down your faith to your offspring and strive to continuously uphold strong faith, you will be able to repay the four debts of gratitude, including repay your obligation to your parents and to the three treasures.

(Collected Sermons of High Priest Nichinyo Shonin [Goshinan-shū], Vol. 14, p. 10)

We must never neglect our efforts to enable our children and grandchildren to inherit and ceaselessly uphold the correct practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, which is the path to true happiness.

Finally, we must hold a broad perspective on passing down our faith to our progeny and transmit our practice not only to our own children, but also to our relatives and to those with whom we have a karmic bond.

Even those who are practicing alone can pass on their faith to others. Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the Goshō, *Reply to Takahashi nyūdo* (Takahashi nyūdo dono-gohenji):

All people after my passing are my children. I look upon each of them with equal compassion. *(Goshō, p. 887)*

We must emulate the supreme life condition of Nichiren Daishonin. Let's foster tremendous faith in our hearts, so that we can look upon all people in the world as though they are our own children.

If we steadfastly pray to the Gohonzon every day and advance with compassion in our shakubuku efforts, and in our efforts to help the new members grow and develop, then people definitely will appear to help us fulfill our aspirations.

Our practice enables us to open our future in all possible ways. Therefore, let us strive to exert our utmost efforts in our faith and practice and accumulate benefits and good karma.