

Practicing Without Regression

When we first encountered true Buddhism, we were full of gratitude with a sense of devotion in our hearts, as we converted to Buddhism by receiving the Gojukai Ceremony (the Ceremony of Accepting the Precepts). At the Gojukai Ceremony, what vows did we make to the Gohonzon?

We swore to the Gohonzon that we will uphold the following three precepts, First, we swore to believe in and practice the true teachings of Nichiren Daishonin throughout our lives. Second, we swore to uphold and protect the Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws throughout our lives. Third, we swore to keep the precept of Nichiren Shoshu and maintain faith and practice without any dishonesty throughout our lives.

In other words, we pledged through these three precepts to carry through our practice without ever regressing. Furthermore, through the Gojukai Ceremony, we are able to receive the precept of the diamond chalice (*kongō hōki kai*), which enables us to take faith in and practice to the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching. We made a firm determination and vowed to embrace and uphold the true Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin throughout our lives.

Nichiren Daishonin states in the *Recorded Lectures* (Onkō kikigaki), he states:

A votary, whose practice is like water, never slackens, like the water that continually flows day and night. His practice never ceases even in the slightest. Therefore, those who believe in the Lotus Sutra in this way are known as practitioners whose faith is like flowing water.

(*Gosho*, p. 1856)

Thus, the priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu must advance with faith as pure as flowing water, throughout the beginning, middle, and end, without ever regressing.

However, the world is full of various religions and doctrines. Our lives are plagued by the four and eight sufferings. Furthermore, many evil influences and devilish functions will appear to obstruct the pledges and determinations that we made to the Gohonzon.

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

Many people aspire to achieve enlightenment, but only a few of them continue without regressing and attain the true Way. Thus, the objectives of common mortals to attain Buddhahood are frequently betrayed by evil influences and easily swayed by conditions and events. (*Gosho*, p. 1048)

When we first embrace true Buddhism, we are determined to exert our utmost efforts into our Buddhist practice; to practice assiduously toward attaining enlightenment; and to serve the Gohonzon, no matter what. However, there are times when obstacles and devils may cause us to slacken in our faith and practice. Consequently, it is necessary to cultivate faith that cannot be defeated by devilish functions.

In *Questions and Answers between a Sage and a Foolish Man* (Shōgu mondō-shō), the Daishonin writes:

The unenlightened man lowered his head, raised his hand, and said, “From now on, I will embrace the single truth of the Lotus Sutra, the king of sutras, and uphold the Buddha as my true teacher—the only one worthy of honor in the threefold world. From now on, in my present state of common mortal, I will never regress in my faith and practice, until I have attained Buddhahood.”...The sage said, “The mind of a human is like water that forms to the shape of any vessel, and the nature of all living beings is like the reflection of the moon dancing on the waves. Therefore, at the present time, you may say that your faith is solid, but on another day in the future, you are bound to reverse that. Devils and demons may come before you, but you must not be disturbed by them. The Devil of the Sixth Heaven detests the Law of the Buddha, and the non-Buddhist individuals loathe the Buddhist doctrines. However, you must be like the mountain of gold that increases in brightness when a boar brushes against it (even though the boar intend to tarnish the mountain of gold); like the ocean that is filled by great numbers of streams; like the fire that intensifies when firewood is added; and like the kalakula insect (Jpn. *gura*) that grows in size as it feeds on the wind. Then, how can the outcome be none other than good? (*Gosho*, p. 408)

When devilish functions appear before us and compete to obstruct our way, we should never be distressed. Instead, we must arouse strong faith and practice capable of even using the workings of the devil to our advantage. This is the key to maintaining faith and practice without regression.

How, then, can we cultivate such faith? Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the *Risshō ankoku-ron* (On Securing the Peace of the Land Through the Propagation of True Buddhism):

If one tries to refute slander of the sutra, he will definitely reach the stage of non-regression.

(*Gosho*, p. 247; *The Gosho of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, p. 34)

By refuting slander of the Law—that is, by performing shakubuku—we will be able to firmly secure our faith and practice without any regression. This is clearly apparent when we observe the entire lifetime of Nichiren Daishonin.

In the *Opening of the Eyes* (Kaimoku-shō), the Daishonin states:

Let the heavenly deities abandon me. Let me encounter all persecutions. Even then, I will not begrudge my life [for the Law]!...For good or for evil, discarding the Lotus Sutra is an act that will lead one to hell. I hereby make a great pledge. Even if I am told that I will assume the position of the sovereign of Japan if I cast aside the Lotus Sutra and follow the Sutra of Meditation on the Buddha of Infinite Life (*Kammuryōju-kyō*) and look forward to an afterlife; even if I am told that my father and mother will be beheaded if I do not utter the Nembutsu; and regardless of the various great obstacles I may encounter, I will never succumb to them, so long as wise men do not overturn my teachings. All other great obstacles are like dust before the wind. I will be the pillar of Japan. I will be the eyes of Japan, and I will be the great ship of Japan. This is what I pledge, and I will never break my word! (*Gosho*, p. 572)

The Daishonin declares that even if one encounters obstacles so severe that he wonders if the protective deities have forsaken him; even if someone threatens him; and even if someone flatters him, one must remain unmoved. This is because discarding one’s faith and practice is a karmic cause for falling into hell. We must single-mindedly believe in the Gohonzon and advance with devotion to

propagate Myoho-Renge-Kyo. We are able to learn about the true spirit of never regressing or slackening by observing very life condition of Nichiren Daishonin, the True Buddha.

Throughout his life, Nichiren Daishonin upheld the three pledges that he had made without ever regressing. Furthermore, as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, he achieved the ultimate purpose of his advent into this world—to save all mankind. In other words, he established the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching. Because of the Daishonin's great compassion to save all humanity, even by risking his life, we are able to receive benefits and create good karma every day from our faith and practice based on the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin gave the following guidance about faith and practice without regression:

The Daishonin states:

Single-mindedly chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and encourage others to do the same.

This will remain as your only memory from this present, human life. (*Gosho*, p. 300)

Thus, the most important point is our self-realization that we are the followers of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth and that we must stand firmly on our solid pledge to save all mankind. We must exert our utmost efforts in our faith and practice for ourselves and for others by doing shakubuku with a strong determination never to regress in our faith, based on our absolute conviction in the Dai-Gohonzon. (*Dainichiren*, No. 728, p. 34)

We must follow the directions of our High Priest thoroughly, and muster our efforts to perform Gongyo and chant Daimoku every day. Furthermore, based on the tremendous power of the benefits we receive, we must do shakubuku and cultivate faith in others every day. This is the direct path for us to attain enlightenment.

Let us renew our determination never to regress in our faith and practice, as we proceed toward our objective of establishing an organization of 800,000 Hokkeko believers by 2021, the 800th anniversary of the advent of Nichiren Daishonin. Let us advance with the unity of *itai dōshin*—many in body, one in mind—between the priests and lay believers, and uphold the practice for ourselves and for others, as we proceed toward the achievement of our shakubuku goal for this year, and furthermore, toward attaining enlightenment in this lifetime and advancing kōsen-rufu.