

## **An Excellent Master, the Excellent Law, And an Excellent Believer**

As we all know neither kōsen-rufu nor our designated annual goals can be achieved successfully by the efforts of the priests or lay believers alone. It is essential for the priesthood and laity to form an inseparable unity, like the fish and the water in which they swim. The fundamental basis for such unity is the solidarity between the priests and lay believers in each of the local temples and propagation centers.

In order to create this unity, the priesthood and laity, as well as fellow believers, must always be respectful and considerate in their dealings with each other. They must seek to cultivate understanding for differences among themselves and establish relationships of trust. In building these relationships, the priests and lay believers must exert their efforts and be mindful of being excellent master and excellent believers respectively.

In the Goshō, *Attaining Enlightenment at the Initial Stage of Faith through the Lotus Sutra* (Hokke shoshin jōbutsu-shō), Nichiren Daishonin states:

An excellent master is a compassionate priest who is innocent of any misdeeds, never fawns on others, is content with little, reads and maintains his faith in the Lotus Sutra as taught in the sutra, and encourages others to embrace the Lotus Sutra. Such a priest is praised by the Buddha as the teacher of the Law, supreme among all the priests.  
(*Goshō*, p. 1314)

In short, as Nichiren Daishonin's disciple, first, a priest should not have committed any transgressions in the secular world. Second, he is not one who fawns upon people. Third, he must desire little and be satisfied with his few possessions. Fourth, he must be compassionate. Fifth, he must embrace the Three Great Secret Laws and perform shakubuku. The Daishonin introduces these five qualities.

Priests who teach and lead people must always be mindful to take the initiative and set a good example in their practice for themselves and for others.

Next, Nichiren Daishonin states the following about excellent believers:

An excellent believer is the one who does not grovel before the nobles, does not despise a lowly person, does not rely on people's opinions, and instead, takes faith in the Lotus Sutra among all sutras. According to the Buddha, such a believer is the best of all individuals. (ibid.)

The Daishonin explains that excellent believer or follower does not alter his thoughts, words, and behavior according to whether people are noble or mean. Such a believer does not become subservient or arrogant depending on the social position of those he encounters. He is not influenced by people, and all his assessments are based on the principles of the Law. Among all the sutras, he upholds the Lotus Sutra. Such are the qualities of an excellent believer.

In other words, first, an excellent believer is a person who respects and reveres all people, regardless of their station in life—whether they are rich and powerful or poor—and interacts with all of them fairly. Second, he is capable of making assessments based on reason and the Law and not on the opinions or words of others. Third, he sincerely embraces the correct doctrine of Nichiren Daishonin's true Buddhism, the supreme teaching of the Buddha. Such are the qualities of an excellent believer.

Finally, the Daishonin explains the following about the excellent Law:

The excellent Law is the Lotus Sutra. Compared with all the sutras that the Buddha has preached, now preaches, and will preach, the Lotus Sutra reigns supreme. That is why it is defined as the excellent Law. (ibid.)

The excellent Law, in the Latter Day of the Law, is none other than the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, which constitutes the entirety of the Three Great Secret Laws.

Nichikan Shonin, the Twenty-sixth High Priest, states the following about the benefits of the Gohonzon:

Accordingly, if one embraces this Gohonzon, no prayer will go unanswered, no fortune will be unbestowed, no sin will be unforgiven, and no truth will remain unrevealed. Therefore, those who believe in and uphold this Gohonzon, in fact, will attain enlightenment through this singular practice of embracing [the Gohonzon]. Indeed, this is all the more reason to recite the mystic Law (*Myōhō*) to the Gohonzon. (*Mondan*, p. 539)

We must single-mindedly embrace the Gohonzon and, throughout our life, we must perform the practice for ourselves and for others, by conducting Gongyō, chanting Daimoku, doing shakubuku, and promoting growth and development in faith. By so doing, we can then forge a life condition of enlightenment and eradicate the various root-causes of suffering, as we correctly advance in our lives.

Furthermore, as Nichiren Shoshu priests and lay believers who uphold true Buddhism—the excellent Law—of Nichiren Daishonin, we must embrace the following golden words:

An excellent master, an excellent believer, and the excellent Law—only when these three are united, can a practitioner have his prayers answered, and even disasters that may befall the land can be driven away. (*Gosho*, p. 1314)

The priests must aspire to become excellent masters, and the laity must endeavor to become excellent believers. As priests and lay believers, we must form a solid unity and diligently strive together, as we mutually communicate and encourage one another. Then, we will be able to ultimately achieve our great objective of *kōsen-rufu*, the permeation of true Buddhism throughout the world, and we can even eliminate the terrible disasters from our nation.

However, although we comprise an organization upholding true Buddhism, we are as yet individual common mortals who are in the midst of our practice. The workings of devilish functions are strong, and we still possess many earthly desires. Therefore, there are occasions when various difficulties and obstacles may arise.

When we encounter such difficult occasion, it is important not to be swept away by our own emotions. At that time, we must repeatedly read and follow the directions of High Priest Nichinyo Shonin, earnestly listen to the guidance of the chief priest, chant Daimoku, invigorate our faith and practice, and sincerely pray.

Nichiren Daishonin provides the following instructions in *Reply to Shijō Kingo* (Shijō kingo dono-gohenji):

If a follower and his teacher pray with differing thoughts, their actions are as pointless as lighting a fire on water. (*Gosho*, p. 1118)

The Daishonin teaches us that, for our prayers to come true, the aspirations of the lay believers and those of the priests must be one in spirit. Otherwise, those prayers will not come true, much like trying to kindle a fire on water is an impossible endeavor.

In order for our prayers to come true, the priests and lay believers must come together, single-mindedly chant Daimoku together, and sincerely pray, as mentioned in the passage:

...only when these three are united, can a practitioner have his prayers answered, and even disasters that may befall the land can be driven away. (*Gosho*, p. 1314)

When the priests and lay believers walk together on the path to kōsen-rufu and when they share laughter, tears, and sweat, as they advance with devotion, they will increasingly strengthen their profound bond.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin stated:

Kōsen-rufu characterizes the oneness of the priests and lay believers. It can be attained only after the unity of the priests and lay believers is achieved. Accordingly, it cannot be achieved by the priests alone. And it is also impossible for the lay believers alone to attain. Ultimately, the priests and lay believers must unite as one to achieve kōsen-rufu. (*Dainichiren*, No. 724, p. 92)

I would like to conclude my sermon for today by whole-heartedly praying that you, as excellent believers, will vigorously propagate the Law to the best of your ability, aiming forward the achievement of kōsen-rufu in your individual regions, towards the establishment of an organization of 800,000 Hokkeko believers by 2021, the 800th anniversary of the advent of our Founder Nichiren Daishonin.