

## Admonition against Arrogance

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the Goshō, *Questions and Answers on Embracing the Lotus Sutra* (Jimyō hokke mondō-shō):

Even if you look upon those with great capacity, do not denigrate yourself. The true purpose [of the Buddha] is not to abandon even those of menial capacity. Even if you encounter those of inferior capacity, do not become arrogant. There are times when even people with superior capacity fail to attain enlightenment because they do not devote themselves completely.

(*Goshō*, p. 298)

This means that we must not compare ourselves to others to see if we are superior or inferior to them. The purpose of the Buddha's practice is to bring salvation even to those with low life conditions, so there is no reason for us to have an inferiority complex. However, we must never possess an arrogant heart and look down upon others. Such people will lose out and be omitted from the Buddha's salvation, because they do not devotedly perform the Buddhist practice.

High Priest Nichinyō Shonin presents the following directions concerning arrogance:

I would like you to try your best never to become arrogant. Arrogance creates gaps in your practice, which will function to destroy you. Therefore, you must never become arrogant...There is a saying, "Arrogance will lead to destruction before long" (literally, "The haughty Heike clan did not last for long"). It means that you must never be haughty. In the Daishonin's Buddhism, all people will receive salvation. However, if there ever are persons who cannot be saved, it is certain that they are arrogant individuals.

(*Dainichiren*, No. 831, p. 55)

In the proverb, "Arrogance will lead to destruction before long" (literally, "The haughty Heike clan did not last for long"), the Heike clan is a reference to the supremely glorious warrior clan in 11th century Japan that fell from grace and perished. The Heike clan, centered around Taira-no Kiyomori, constructed a

powerfully solid organization. However, as we can see from their arrogant saying, “If they are not Heike, then they are not even human,” the members of this clan gradually incurred repulsion of the population and ultimately went down the path to ruin.

Our actions should be based on our conviction, which comes from experience and belief in our own capability. However, there is a proverb that teaches, “Too much of a good thing is as bad as too little.” When we have excessive conviction, we run the risk of becoming conceited and ultimately looking down upon others. Then, we are unable to listen to the opinions of those around us. This condition may be manifested as arrogance and haughtiness in our words and deeds.

Egotistic and overconfident attitudes, and words and deeds belittling others all are manifestations of arrogance. We must be mindful not to engage in these, not only in society at large, but also particularly in our faith and practice of true Buddhism.

Buddhism expounds the principle of the five delusive passions. They consist of the three poisons of greed, anger, and stupidity, and the two additional elements of doubt, in which one does not believe in the Law, and arrogance, which is one of the intrinsic earthly desires possessed by humans. The Buddhist teachings indicate that these are the karmic causes that prevent people from attaining enlightenment.

Nichiren Daishonin states:

There are different forms of the earthly desire of arrogance, such as the seven types, the nine types, and the eight types of arrogance.

(*Gosho*, p. 869)

Thus, Buddhism expounds various forms of arrogance. Here, we will focus on the seven types of arrogance (*shichi man*):

- 1) Arrogance (*man*): An attitude in which a person flaunts one’s superiority over those who are inferior
- 2) Haughty arrogance (*ka man*): Thinking that one is superior to those who are actually one’s equals, and thinking that one is an equal to those who, in fact, are superior
- 3) Condescending arrogance (*man ka man*): Thinking that one is far superior to those who, in actuality, are superior to him/her
- 4) Self-centered arrogance (*ga man*): Being obsessed with one’s own arbitrary thoughts and views
- 5) Supreme arrogance (*zōjō man*): Haughtily believing that one has mastered the Buddhist teachings, even though he/her has not achieved a correct understanding of them
- 6) Immodest arrogance (*hi man*): Thinking that one is only slightly inferior to those who are actually significantly superior

7) Pompous arrogance (*ja man*): Being overcome by heretical views and haughtily believing that one is virtuous when, in fact, one possesses no virtues.

Of these, supreme arrogance is also one of the nine types of arrogance (*ku man*). The Encouraging Devotion (*Kanji*; thirteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra explains that, after the passing of Shakyamuni, various forms of persecution will be inflicted upon the votaries of the Lotus Sutra by the three powerful enemies. These three powerful enemies are: extremely arrogant lay people, extremely arrogant priests, and extremely arrogant false sages.

During the lifetime of Nichiren Daishonin, the priests and lay followers of other sects who persecuted him and his disciples and believers corresponded to extremely arrogant lay people and priests. The Daishonin explains that Ryōkan of Gokurakuji Temple, who was manipulating them behind the scenes, is characterized as an extremely arrogant false sage. Ultimately, as enemies of the Lotus Sutra, these powerful enemies display slanderous behavior against true Buddhism.

Meanwhile, there also are those who practice Buddhism who manifest arrogance. In the Expedient Means (*Hōben*; second) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, there is a description of the 5,000 people who, in spite of the fact that they were in the position to practice true Buddhism, ultimately renounced their faith because of their supreme arrogance. The sutra explains that those 5,000 people had not as yet attained enlightenment but arrogantly believed that they already had done so. They felt that they no longer needed to listen to Shakyamuni's sermon. Consequently, they rose from their seats and left the assembly. As a result, these persons who had become arrogant were unable to attain enlightenment at the assembly of the Lotus Sutra.

Thus, even though we have been able to uphold true Buddhism, our arrogance may cause us to lose sight of maintaining a sincere attitude in faith. If this occurs, we not only will lose the opportunity to gain benefits; in fact, we ultimately will renounce our faith and descend into the evil paths. This is a lesson that we truly must take to heart.

Nichiren Daishonin also discussed the principle of the fourteen slanders, which are issues that both priests and lay believers need to be careful about. In the *Gosho, Reply to Matsuno* (Matsuno dono-gohenji), the Daishonin referred to the following question by Matsuno, who was a believer during the Daishonin's lifetime:

Nichiren Daishonin, how great is the difference between the benefits of the Daimoku that you chant, and those of the Daimoku that we chant as your disciples and followers?

(*Gosho*, p. 1046, summarized)

The Daishonin explained that there is absolutely no difference in the benefits of chanting Daimoku. However, he also states:

However, there will be a difference if one chants while opposing the heart of this sutra.

(ibid.)

He admonishes us that if we turn our backs on the heart of the Lotus Sutra, we will be unable to gain any benefits, regardless of how assiduously we practice, thus we never will be able to attain Buddhahood.

By making reference to the fourteen slanders (*jūshi hōbō*), the Daishonin continues to explain what it means to oppose the heart of the Lotus Sutra. He writes:

There are fourteen causes of evil: (1) arrogance, (2) negligence, (3) arbitrary, egotistical judgment, (4) shallow, self-satisfied understanding, (5) attachment to earthly desires, (6) lack of understanding without a seeking spirit, (7) not believing, (8) aversion, (9) deluded doubt, (10) vilification, (11) contempt, (12) hatred, (13) jealousy and (14) grudges. These fourteen slanders are equally applicable to both lay believers and priests.

(ibid.)

The following is a brief description of the fourteen slanders:

- 1) Arrogance is to have a haughty attitude toward true Buddhism and to hold it in disdain.
- 2) Negligence is to slacken off and be lazy about our Buddhist practice.
- 3) Arbitrary, egotistical judgment is to assess true Buddhism according to our own arbitrary thoughts.
- 4) Shallow, self-satisfied understanding is to pass judgment on Buddhism, which is profound and vast, by using our own shallow knowledge.
- 5) Attachment to earthly desires is to form an attachment to desires, to hold true Buddhism in disdain, and to not even try to seek it.
- 6) Lack of understanding without a seeking spirit is one's lack of will to correctly understand true Buddhism.
- 7) Not believing refers to one who does not believe in true Buddhism.
- 8) Aversion is to contort one's face and condemn true Buddhism.
- 9) Deluded doubt denotes one who doubts true Buddhism and loses one's way.
- 10) Vilification is to denigrate and slander true Buddhism.
- 11) Contempt is to disrespect those who embrace true Buddhism and to hold them in disdain.
- 12) Hatred is to detest those who embrace true Buddhism.
- 13) Jealousy is to begrudge and resent those who embrace true Buddhism.
- 14) Grudges represent to loathing and hating people who embrace true Buddhism.

These fourteen slanders are described in the Parable (*Hiyu*; third) chapter of the Lotus Sutra (*Hokekyo*, p. 175) as evil causes that will cause one to fall into *Avichi* Hell after the end of one's life. The first through the tenth slanders—arrogance through vilification—function to admonish a person's own attitude toward faith. The next slanders, from contempt to grudges, are admonitions against bearing grudges against those who embrace true Buddhism or slandering them.

A passage in the *Letter to Ni'ike* (Ni'ike-gosho) states:

If a person commits even one of the fourteen slanders, he will be unable to expiate his offences.

(*Gosho* p. 1456, summarized)

And we are cautioned to be especially mindful of not committing the first slander:

When people first begin to believe in this sutra, they appear to be sincere in their faith. However, midway through their practice, many weaken in their faith and no longer serve or respect the priest or present offerings. They arrogantly form their own evil views. We must fear this!

(*Gosho*, p. 1457)

This passage warns us to beware of committing the first slander of arrogance as we pursue the way of the Buddha.

Furthermore, in the *Gosho*, *Nembutsu Leads to the Hell of Incessant Suffering* (*Nembutsu muken jigoku-shō*), Nichiren Daishonin states:

The fourteen slanders will arise from the slander of not believing.

(*Gosho*, p. 39)

He points out that lack of faith will eventually lead us to slander true Buddhism. One's arrogance gradually will turn into a contemptuous attitude toward the three treasures of the Buddha, the Law, and the priesthood. Under such conditions, a person not only will be unable to accept the correct teaching, but also will slander true Buddhism. We must truly fear this.

In the *Gosho*, *Questions and Answers on Embracing the Lotus Sutra* (*Jimyō hokke mondō-shō*), the Daishonin made the following strict admonition:

If you seek to become a Buddha, you should lay down the banner of arrogance, cast away the staff of anger, and devote yourself solely to the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra. Fame and honor are nothing more than decorations in this life. Arrogance and attachment to biased

views are hindrances in attaining Buddhahood in your future existences. You should be ashamed of them! You should fear them!

(*Gosho*, p. 296)

In *Letter to Ni'ike* (Ni'ike gosho), Nichiren Daishonin describes the attitude that we must nurture to halt feelings of arrogance:

By all means, approach the priest who knows the heart of this sutra. Listen to what he says about the truth of this Law and proceed forth in your journey of faith.

(*Gosho*, p. 1457)

Here, the “priest who knows the heart of this sutra” refers to none other than True Buddha Nichiren Daishonin. He teaches us that the key to enlightenment exists in our sincere faith, which enables us to earnestly follow the Daishonin’s teachings. Moreover, he writes:

The Lotus sutra cannot be understood without the transmission of the heritage.

(*Gosho*, p. 92)

We must honestly follow the directions of our High Priest, who has received the transmission of the Lifeblood Heritage of the Law entrusted to a single person. It is essential to continue our sincere practice for ourselves and for others. In other words, we must exert our utmost efforts in our daily practice of Gongyō, chanting Daimoku, doing shakubuku, and helping others develop their faith.

Let us form a solid unity of many in body, one in mind (*itai dōshin*) between priesthood and laity and exert our best efforts in our faith and practice. Let’s advance together toward the objective we received from our High Priest, to achieve a membership of 800,000 Hokkeko believers by the 800th anniversary of the advent of our Founder, Nichiren Daishonin in 2021.