

Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin  
August 2017, Oko Lecture

## Faith and Practice based on the Principle of Changing Poison into Medicine (*Hendoku iyaku*)

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the Gosho, *Reply to Kyō'ō*  
(Kyō'ō dono gohenji):

Misfortunes will transform into good fortune. Exert yourself, increase your faith, and pray to this Gohonzon. What is there that you cannot achieve?

(*Gosho*, p. 685)

Buddhism expounds the principle of “changing poison into medicine” (*hendoku iyaku*), a process of transforming misfortunes into fortune through our faith and practice.

In the term “changing poison into medicine”, poison (*doku*) represents our earthly desires. Medicine (*yaku*) refers to benefits. Ordinarily, poison and medicine are polar opposites in their functions. However, a skilled physician is able to transform poison into medicine and treat illnesses.

A simple explanation of faith and practice based on the principle of changing poison into medicine is that, by believing in and practicing to the Dai-Gohonzon, which inherently possesses the entirety of the Three Great Secret Laws, we can transform our earthly desires into benefits, and we can cultivate a solid and stable life that cannot be destroyed by any adversity.

In the world, there are numerous incredible and mysterious phenomena that are difficult to prove, even with modern science. The wisdom of the Buddha, who possesses the power to save all mankind, is incomparably more profound than that of worldly, learned individuals.

Shakyamuni Buddha, in an effort to save various types of people, expounded numerous sutras for more than forty years. Then, during his last eight years, he preached the Lotus Sutra, which was the ultimate purpose of his advent into this world. He taught the way for all people to achieve enlightenment. Furthermore, Shakyamuni Buddha predicted that two thousand years after his entry into nirvana, the True Buddha would make his advent and bring fundamental salvation to all

types of people throughout the entire world instead of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings.

True to Shakyamuni Buddha's prediction in the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin made his advent as the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra throughout Jambudvīpa. He chanted Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō and furthermore inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, which inherently contains the entirety of the Three Great Secret Laws, in order to illuminate the darkness in hearts of the people of the Latter Day of the Law.

The Daishonin teaches us about the benefits of Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō in the following passage from *Letter to Gijō-bō* (Gijō bō-gosho):

Understanding the benefits of the Lotus Sutra is entirely within the realm of the Buddhas. It is an inner realization that even the wisdom of all the Buddhas in the ten directions may or may not be able to comprehend. Thus, the Great Teacher Tiantai interpreted that the single character "Myō" means inscrutable.

(*Gosho*, p. 668)

The Daishonin states that, if we single-mindedly believe in the Gohonzon, which will lead all mankind in the Latter Day of the Law to enlightenment, and chant Daimoku to it, we will be able to gain tremendous benefits and good fortune. These benefits are impossible for us, as common mortals, to fathom through our eyes and our knowledge.

Furthermore, Nichiren Daishonin states the following about changing poison into medicine, a benefit of Myōhō-Renge-Kyō, in *Reply to Utsubusa nyōbō* (Utsubusa nyōbō-gohenji):

Let me briefly describe the virtues of Myōhō-Renge-Kyō. The five characters of Myōhō-Renge-Kyō can change evil into good, just like poison changing into medicine. Pristine Spring is so named because in this spring, stone can change into treasure. In the same manner, these five characters are able to change common mortals into Buddhas.

(*Gosho*, p. 1492)

The Daishonin presents the polar opposites of poison and medicine, evil and good, stones and gems, and common mortals and Buddhas. He explains that the Gohonzon of Nam-Myōhō-Renge-Kyō possesses the great benefit of the attainment of enlightenment in one's present form, so that this Gohonzon can transform poison into medicine, evil into good, stones into gems, and common mortals into Buddhas.

The Daishonin expounds the meaning of attaining enlightenment in one's present form in *On First Hearing the One Vehicle of the Buddha* (Shimon butsuji gi):

What is poison? Poison indicates our three paths of earthly desires, karma, and suffering. What is medicine? Medicine indicates the three virtues [of the Buddha]: the property of the Law, wisdom, and emancipation. What is meant by “skillfully turning poison into medicine?” It means to transform the three paths into the three virtues. The Great Teacher Tiantai stated: “‘Myo’ means inscrutable...” He also stated, “One’s mind is...an objective reality that is inscrutable.”  
(*Gosho*, p. 1208)

The Daishonin also teaches the following in the *Gosho*, *On the Meaning of the True Entity of Myoho-Renge-Kyo* (Tōtaigi-shō):

Those who honestly discard the expedient teachings, put faith only in the Lotus Sutra, and chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, will transform the three paths of earthly desires, karma, and suffering into the three virtues of the property of the Law, wisdom, and emancipation. The threefold contemplation and the three truths will immediately manifest in their minds, and the place where they dwell will become the land of eternally tranquil light.

(*Gosho*, p. 694)

Thus, we, as common mortals, can directly change our three paths of earthly desires, karma, and suffering, which are poisons into the three virtues of the property of the Law, wisdom, and emancipation, which refer to medicines. The powerful functions of the Gohonzon only can be manifested through sincere faith in and practice to the Dai-Gohonzon.

All the people in the Latter Day of the Law, unbeknownst to them, have gradually created negative karma and are suffering as a result. The only way they can sever themselves from their negative karma is to believe in and practice Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

Many of our predecessors devoted their entire lives to do shakubuku and propagate the true Law. As a result, we fortunately have been able to encounter true Buddhism and become individuals who believe in the Dai-Gohonzon. In order to repay our debts of gratitude, it is essential for us to exert our utmost efforts in our faith and practice of true Buddhism. And we must expiate our negative karma from the past, raise ourselves up, and overcome our suffering.

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in *Reply to the Widow of Ueno* (Ueno dono gokeama-gohenji):

Devadatta transformed the Avichi Hell of incessant suffering into the paradise of eternally tranquil light, and the Dragon King’s daughter was able to attain enlightenment directly without changing her form as a dragon. These were possible because the Lotus Sutra enables

even those who initially oppose it to eventually attain enlightenment. These are the benefits of the single character “Myo.” Bodhisattva Nagarjuna stated, “It is likened to an excellent physician skillfully turning poison into medicine.”

(*Gosho*, p. 337)

Thus, the single character *Myo* of Myoho-Renge-Kyo possesses the powerful function of enabling those who initially oppose [the Law] to attain enlightenment. By upholding the practice of this Buddhism with deep faith in the Gohonzon, we are able to reform our lives.

There is a tendency for people to be doubtful in society, and people think that hell remains hell and would never transform into the enlightened land of eternally tranquil light. However, the beneficial power of changing poison into medicine is inherent in the Gohonzon.

Therefore, regardless of how severe and difficult our circumstances may be at the current time, if we perform Gongyō and chant Daimoku to the Gohonzon, do shakubuku, and help others develop their faith, we will be able to purify and strengthen our lives. We will transform the negative karma that exists deep within ourselves into positive karma, and live an excellent life in true happiness.

The Honorable Retired High Priest Nikken Shonin stated:

Based on the Daishonin’s teachings, when you experience negative circumstances in your lives, it is essential to advance with the conviction that the time has come for you to transform difficulties and suffering into true happiness, through benefits of principle of changing poison into medicine.

(*Dainichiren*, No. 529, p. 58)

When we, ourselves, suffer from illness, we can become empathetic towards others who are sick. When we are harassed or bullied by people, we can understand what it is like to be kind and caring toward others. Moreover, if we live a modest lifestyle, we will develop an appreciation for many things.

Our difficult, painful, and sad situations will become the causes for us to develop joy, happiness, and kindness. Therefore, we must pray for the happiness of as many people as possible. Let’s teach them and lead them, through the great medicine of Myoho-Renge-Kyo, which enable them to change poison into medicine.

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

Look upon suffering as suffering and understand joy to be joy. Regard both suffering and joy as what they are and continue chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. This is, indeed the state of boundless joy from the Law. Strengthen your faith more and more.

(*Gosho*, p. 991)

Faith and practice in Nichiren Shoshu is not a periodic practice only for when we are encountering difficulties and suffering. By maintaining strong faith and chanting Daimoku to the Gohonzon no matter what circumstances we may encounter, we will be able to receive the benefit of changing poison into medicine and achieve a life state of boundless joy from the Law.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin stated:

In fact, shakubuku is an essential mission with which we have been tasked by our Founder Nichiren Daishonin, the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. Furthermore, it is the most important Buddhist practice that is truly indispensable for us to attain enlightenment in this lifetime.

(*Dainichiren*, No. 854, p. 36)

Thus, the High Priest instructs us that our mission is to do shakubuku. We must etch this guidance from our High Priest deeply into our hearts and make our daily practice of Gongyō and Shōdai to be the fundamental basis of our lives.

Furthermore, as we advance toward our objective of establishing a Hokkeko organization of 800,000 believers by 2021, the 800th anniversary of the birth of our Founder Nichiren Daishonin, let us lead as many people as possible to embrace this wonderful true Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. Let's achieve the life state of boundless joy from the Law and true peace in society.