Lecture in Praise of Nichiren Daishonin
Jun 2018, Oko Lecture

The Transmigration of the Six Paths
(Rokudō rin'ne)

The Expedient Means (*Hōben*; second) chapter of the Lotus Sutra gives the following description of the state of confusion and delusion in the lives of the people:

> I know that such living beings have never in the past cultivated good roots but have stubbornly clung to the five desires, and their folly and craving have given rise to affliction. Their desires are the cause whereby they fall into the three evil paths, revolving wheel-like through the six realms of existence
> and undergoing every sort of suffering and pain.
> (*Hokekyō*, p. 111; *Lotus Sutra*, Watson, p. 36)

People who are confused or deluded refer to those who do not have any connection to true Buddhism, or those who are unable to correctly believe in and embrace it, even if they encounter it. The five desires of color and form, sound, smell, taste, and texture and the three poisons of greed, anger, and stupidity, in addition to other forms of earthly desires, are strongly operating in the lives of those who do not believe in and embrace true Buddhism. Consequently, such people create negative karmic causes for themselves through their words and deeds. Then, based on the law of cause and effect, the numerous negative causes that they have made appear in their lives as various forms of suffering.

Furthermore, when they ceaselessly repeat this vicious cycle, the transmigration of the six paths *(rokudō rinne)*, the life of confusion and delusion of common mortals, will manifest.

In Buddhism, this state of confusion and delusion is categorized into six worlds called the six paths *(rokudō)*. In the Gosho, *The True Object of Worship* (Kanjin no honzon-shō), Nichiren Daishonin states the following about the six paths:

> Rage is a manifestation of the world of hell; greed is a manifestation of the world of hunger. Stupidity is a manifestation of the world of animality; fawning is a manifestation of the world of anger. Joy is a

> manifestation of the world of rapture, and calmness is a manifestation of the world of humanity.
>
> (*Gosho*, p. 647)

The Daishonin explains that the six life conditions of hell, hunger, animality, anger, humanity, and rapture are inherent in the life of everyone. This means that various emotions, such as joy, anger, sorrow, and delight, which occur in response to the different events in daily life, are, in themselves, the karmic causes for the six paths *(rokudō)*—the conditions of suffering and delusion.

Moreover, this suffering of the six paths is not confined only to the current lifetime, but it actually repeats through the cycle of birth and death, over and over again, based on the principle of the endless cycle of transmigration *(rinne shōji)*.

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

> Since time without beginning, the wine of foolishness has intoxicated us, causing us to be reborn time and time again in the six paths and the four forms of birth.
>
> (*Gosho*, p. 382)

Here, the Daishonin teaches that, since past lifetimes, we have accumulated karmic causes for many types of suffering, based on the life conditions of the six paths that are inherent within us. Furthermore, we will be reincarnated in the future into one of the worlds of the six paths, according to the causes we have made, and we will repeat the cycle of suffering. This is described in the Sutra of the Foundation in Observing the Mind *(Shinjikan-gyō)*:

> Sentient beings transmigrate and are repeatedly reborn into the six paths. This is like the wheel, which has no beginning or end.
>
> (*Taisho Tripitaka*, Vol. 3, 297, No. 2)

Thus, the people in the state of delusion and confusion are unable to escape the six paths, and they continue to suffer infinitely. This condition is known as the transmigration of the six paths.

Let us briefly discuss the six worlds that comprise the six paths.

1. Hell is a life condition of anger and suffering, which is often described by the phrase: “Rage is hell.” We use the words “living hell,” for example, to describe an extreme situation of utter helplessness, being tied down by great suffering, which simply cannot be resolved regardless of our will to do so. This is the state of hell, in which anger and suffering never cease.

2. Hunger is a condition in which people are constantly famished and cannot find food. The Daishonin states that "greed is the world of hunger." Thus, this is a state in which people's infinite desires are never satisfied.

3. Animality describes a life condition in which people lack reason and common sense, and they are foolishly controlled by instinctive desires. As the Daishonin explains, "Foolishness is the realm of animality," people in this state are oblivious to reason, and they are consumed by a desire only for things that lie immediately before their eyes.

These three life conditions of hell, hunger, and animality constitute the three evil paths. When the three evil paths are combined with the fourth element, anger, these are referred to as the four lower worlds. The suffering in these life conditions is known to be particularly intense.

4. This fourth life condition of Anger refers to those who are constantly combative, haughty and arrogant. The Daishonin describes this state by saying, "A distorted mind is that of anger." In this state, people express anger and disingenuous flattery and they become offensively obsequious.

5. Humanity refers to a state in which people are able to evaluate matters calmly and normally. However, they are unable to avoid the various agonies of the four and eight sufferings, such as birth, aging, sickness, and death.

6. Rapture is a life condition of temporary joy.

Each of the six paths represents a delusionary life condition that is full of suffering. Furthermore, while we are transmigrating in these six paths, we find it difficult to escape the cycle in this and future lifetimes.

How, then, can we break away from the transmigration of the six paths? In the Hinayana doctrines, Shakyamuni taught that people transmigrate the six paths because of their earthly desires. He said that they could break away from the suffering of the six paths by extinguishing their earthly desires through Buddhist practice. This is called emancipated enlightenment *(gedatsu)*.

Shakyamuni expounded that Buddhist practice would enable the people to attain the enlightened understanding of the life conditions of learning, realization, and bodhisattva, which are superior to the world of rapture. However, these doctrines were only expedient teachings.

In the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the principle of the mutual possession of the ten worlds was expounded. This doctrine revealed that the world of Buddhahood is inherent in the hearts of all people. Furthermore, the life

conditions of life and death in the six paths can be directly transformed into the world of emancipated enlightenment.

However, the doctrine of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra did not reveal the principle of the true mutual possession of the ten worlds. In the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the doctrine of Shakyamuni's attainment of enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past *(kuon jitsujō)* is expounded. Consequently, the people understood that their own lives were eternal, just like that of the Buddha. They realized that the sowing of the seed of the true cause into their lives occurred in the infinite past of *kuon-ganjo,* and they were able to achieve the true state of emancipated enlightenment—Buddhahood.

Even today, in the Latter Day of the Law, we would never be able to attain salvation from the transmigration of the six paths, unless we possessed a karmic connection with true Buddhism and embraced and practiced it.

Nichiren Daishonin teaches the following in *The One-eyed Turtle and the Floating Sandalwood Log* (Matsuno dono goke-ama gozen gohenji):

> We, as people, have been transmigrating in the threefold world, in the six paths, sometimes born in the world of rapture, sometimes in the world of humanity, and at other times in the states of hell, hunger, or animality. We have been born in innumerable countries and have experienced limitless sufferings and joys. However, not once have we been born in a land where the Lotus Sutra is established. And even if we could possibly have been born in such a land, we have never chanted Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.
>
> (*Gosho*, p. 1354)

In other words, if we were not born in a land where the Lotus Sutra has been propagated, we could not possibly obtain the seed of Buddhahood, which is the cause for us to attain enlightenment. Furthermore, since the doctrine of the Buddha is based on the principle of the three phases of sowing—the Buddhism of the sowing, maturing, and the harvest—we never could expect to find the causal effects to appear where there is no causal seed.

Accordingly, in order to call forth our own Buddha nature that is inherent within our lives, it is necessary to form a karmic bond with Nichiren Daishonin, the True Buddha of the Buddhism of the sowing of the true cause in the Latter Day of the Law. We also must actually perform our Buddhist practice. Nichiren Daishonin describes this Buddhist practice in the following way:

> Apart from the land of eternally tranquil light where the Buddha resides, every realm is a place of suffering. If we leave the realm of [the Buddha's] original enlightenment, what joy can we find? I believe that embracing Myoho-Renge-Kyo, which ensures "peace and security in this lifetime and good

> circumstances in the next," is the only honor to pursue in this lifetime and is the guide to maintain enlightenment in the future. 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)

As the Daishonin instructs us here, we must uphold faith and carry out the Buddhist practice for ourselves and for others. In other words, we must perform Gongyō, chant Daimoku, do shakubuku, and promote growth and development.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin stated:

> To rouse our Buddha nature, it is essential for us to face the Gohonzon, the manifestation of absolute Buddhahood, and to chant the Daimoku of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. When we chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, those of us who have been writhing in pain from the sufferings of life and death through the transmigration of the six paths, since time without beginning, will find that the Buddha nature, inherent within us since the true beginning, will be manifested and will enable us to attain enlightenment.
>
> (*Shingyō yōmon*, p. 54)

Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, all people are able to believe in and embrace the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching and chant the Daimoku of the practice for ourselves and for others. By so doing, we can achieve a life condition in which we can attain enlightenment in our present form and emancipate ourselves from the suffering of the transmigration of the six paths.

This is the “Year of Action.” In keeping with this designation, let us each challenge and overcome the sufferings we experience in our own lives. Furthermore, let us increasingly exert our utmost efforts in our faith and practice for ourselves and for others, as we advance toward the establishment of a membership of 800,000 Hokkeko believers by 2021, when we will celebrate the 800th anniversary of the advent of our Founder, Nichiren Daishonin.