

SHISHIN-KAKU
 VOW TO RETURN THE DHARMA
 TO THE WESTERN HEAVENS

July 10, 1930
 A hermitage in Jissōji-yama, Beppu, Japan

CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF OUR GREAT FOUNDER, Nichiren Daishōnin's lifelong teachings and guidance in the path to enlightenment reveals that he manifested and illuminated the three merits of the sovereign, teacher and parent.¹ He exemplified the principled path for those realms of humans and deities² that are close at hand and whose delusions bind them to the cycle of transmigration; and he taught the tenets of faith, reverence and refuge in the Buddha, who resides afar in the ultimate sacred state of enlightenment free from delusion.³

He beat the drum of remonstration⁴ by inditing *Risshō-ankoku-ron*⁵

1 Nichiren Daishōnin emphasized the three merits of Buddha Śākyamuni as sovereign, teacher and parent based on the Lotus Sūtra's passage "Now this triple world/ All is my domain/ The living beings in it/ All are my children/ But now this place/ Abounds with distress/ And I alone /Am able to save and protect them. [Chapter III, *A Parable*.] Here Guruji is saying that Nichiren Daishōnin assumed these merits as a disciple of the Origin Buddha in his work to fulfill the Buddha's vow to emancipate all sentient beings.

2 The world is divided into ten realms of existence [*jikkai* 十界]: hell, hungry spirits, animals, *asuras*, humans, heavenly beings, sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas. In the six realms from hell to heavenly beings, the lowest three are referred to as the three evil paths 三惡道, and the higher three are called the three good paths 三善道. These six realms are realms of delusion and transmigration. Deities are also part of the six realms of delusion, for while they have supernatural powers, they have not received the Buddha wisdom and are not free from passion.

3 *Gokka-muro-no-shōkyō* 極果無漏の聖境.

4 Synonymous with *dokku* 毒鼓, the poisonous drum. See footnote 24.

5 立正安國論. [Treatise on Giving Rise to the Genuine Dharma to Bring Peace and Tranquility to the Land]. Nichiren Daishōnin's religion is said to have started and ended with *Risshō-ankoku-ron*, a treatise of remonstration against the government. It brought the wrath of the shogunate and marked the beginning of his life under persecution, a life of the practitioner of the Lotus Sūtra. *Risshō-ankoku* is a teaching that when the people in the Era of Final Dharma practice faith in the Lotus Sūtra, as enjoined by Lord Buddha, the physical environment in which the people live [*kokudo-seken* 國土世間] becomes a tranquil Pure Land. It is a world created by the thoughts harbored by an individual, yet is also the true physical environment where the body dwells. This is called *ichinen-sanzen*. However,

as an offering of gratitude to the sovereign, reposed the soul of his master by writing *Requital of Gratitude*⁶ and shed tears of longing from atop Mount Minobu in gratitude for the benevolence of his parents during his nine years of residence.

Some may not be moved to tears by the ordeals he endured during three years of exile at Ito in the region of Izu;⁷ nor by the assault by swords and arrows suffered at Matsubara in the region of Tōjō;⁸ would not shed a tear for the narrowly escaped beheading at the execution grounds in Tatsunokuchi, Katase, in the land of Sagami;⁹ and would

"tranquil is this realm of mine" materializes only when the single thought of the people becomes one and the same as the single thought of Lord Buddha. In his final discourse on *Risshō-ankoku-ron* on his deathbed at Ikegami, Nichiren Daishōnin directed his disciples to continue the work of *Risshō-ankoku* and fulfill his legacy by reading the *Lotus Sūtra* with their body and lives.

6 *Hōon-jō* 報恩鈔. Written on July 21, 1276 at Mount Minobu after receiving notice of the death of his master, Dōzen-bō.

7 One of the four major persecutions endured by Nichiren Daishōnin. After presenting the shogunate with *Risshō-ankoku-ron*, Nichiren Daishōnin was captured by the shogunate and exiled to Itō 伊東 in Izu Peninsula [current Shizuoka prefecture] on May 12th of the first year of the Kōchō 弘長 period [1261]. Nichiren Daishōnin was abandoned at Mana-itā Reef [Butcher's Block], a tiny spur of rock, which was almost submerged by the incoming tide. Although the people of Itō were forbidden to shelter or look after Nichiren Daishōnin, Yasaburō 弥三郎, a fisherman, approached in a small boat and rescued him. Yasaburō took Nichiren Daishōnin to his humble hut. Out of concern for the safety of the fisherman and his wife for aiding a criminal, Nichiren Daishōnin declined to stay with them. The couple, with sorrow in their hearts, led Nichiren Daishōnin to a small grotto near the beach and brought him food and water in the secrecy of night to sustain his life for the following months. A pardon was issued on February 22, 1263. Biographical information based on *Nichiren, Leader of Buddhist Reformation in Japan* by J.A. Christensen.

8 Nichiren Daishōnin's party of approximately ten disciples and devotees was ambushed on November 11 in the first year of the Bunei period [1264] while en route to visit the Lord of Amatsu 天津, Kudō Yoshitaka 工藤吉隆. The night was drawing near when they entered Komatsubara 小松原, "Pine Forest," where the dense canopy overhead further blocked the light. They were assaulted by a troop of well-armed warriors led by Lord Tōjō Kagenobu 東条景信, an ardent Nenbutsu believer infuriated over the teachings of Nichiren Daishōnin. Lord Kudō came to the rescue, but was outnumbered by the assailants. Disciple Kyōnin-bō 境忍坊 was killed on the spot, two others fatally wounded, and Lord Kudō also died later from his wounds. Lord Tōjō, seeing Nichiren Daishōnin isolated from the rest, dashed forward to behead him. Nichiren Daishōnin stood quietly with his palms pressed together, holding his prayer beads. Legend has it that Lord Tōjō's horse was spooked by a sudden flash of light reflected from the prayer beads and lifted its hooves dropping Lord Tōjō from his saddle.

9 On September 12 of the 8th year of Bunei 文永 [1271], at the age of 51, Nichiren Daishōnin was captured by the Kamakura shogunate and then mounted on a saddle-less horse like a common criminal and marched through the streets to the execution grounds at Tatsunokuchi 竜の口, Katase 片瀬 as the crowd mocked and jeered him. His devotees knelt along the way crying, but his disciples were all imprisoned and could not bid farewell

remain unmoved by the four years¹⁰ of privation, particularly at the Sanmai-dō in Tsukahara,¹¹ Sado Island. But who could hold back tears when reflecting on the heart of filial piety that compelled Nichiren Daishōnin, at more than 60 years of age, to climb the precipitous, six-kilometer path to gaze in the direction of his parents' grave? Nothing could be more telling of the constant regret in his heart than the words uttered en route to Tatsunokuchi as he faced his last moments: "I, Nichiren, born a mendicant who walks the path of poverty,¹² fell short in filial piety towards my parents."¹³ Confined in the depth of snow at Tsukahara, he pined for his parents saying, "May circumstances enable me to see my parents' grave just one last time." At Mount Minobu he spoke

to their master. At Tatsunokuchi, Nichiren Daishōnin dismounted the horse and made his way to the straw mat where his beheading was to take place. He knelt and pressed his palms together, chanted Na Mu Myō Hō Ren Ge Kyō and bent his head before the lifted sword. According to Nichiren Daishōnin's own account, suddenly the midnight sky was ablaze with fire. "A ball of light as bright as the moon, flew from the southeast to the northwest, and all the people became visible, although the moon of the twelfth day had already set." The executioner's sword fell to the ground and shattered. After the unsuccessful execution, Nichiren Daishōnin was soon banished to Sado Island.

10 The actual time span was October 1271 to March 1274. In counting this as four years Guruji is following Eastern tradition and including each calendar year.

11 In October 1271 the order for exile to Sado Island was carried out, and Nichiren Daishōnin arrived at Tsukahara 塚原 in Sado Island 佐渡島 on November 28, 1271. A dilapidated 6x6 feet square remains of a temple called Sanmai-dō 三昧堂 in the middle of a wasteland became his abode. Tsukahara was the dumping grounds of criminals' corpses. An ardent Nenbutsu samurai, Abutsubō 阿仏坊, initially approached Nichiren Daishōnin to kill him, but turned into a believer of the Lotus Sūtra. He and his wife, Sennichi-gozen 千日御前, secretly brought offerings of food, clothing and firewood. When learning of Nichiren Daishōnin's arrival, several hundreds of Nenbutsu and Ritsu School monks and laity gathered and conspired to kill him. Lord Honma Shigetsura 本間重連 issued orders not to kill Nichiren Daishōnin but instead to challenge him in debate. Monk scholars from around the nation gathered to challenge Nichiren Daishōnin, but were all refuted. Nichiren Daishōnin's reputation spread far and wide.

12 貧道. *Hindō*. Literally, "one who walks the path of poverty." It is a reference to a practitioner of the Lotus Sūtra who is poor and without worldly influence as a result of practicing according to Buddha Śākyamuni's command in *The Final Commission*.

13 In the passage previous to this quote from *The Various Conducts of the Master 種々御振舞御書*, Nichiren Daishōnin talks about his previous lives. So rather than bemoaning his poverty, Nichiren Daishōnin is expressing deep gratitude that in this lifetime he is living his mission as a practitioner of the Lotus Sūtra. His regret regarding filial piety is that he believes it to be inadequate for a disciple of Lord Buddha. The full quote reads, "I, Nichiren, born a mendicant who walks the path of poverty, fell short in filial piety towards my parents nor did I possess the ability to requite the debt of gratitude to my country. May the merits of sacrificing my life for the Lotus Sūtra this time be an offering to the souls of my parents."

longingly, "Even the breeze that blows from the east¹⁴ draws me out to the yard; its touch against my skin comforts my longing." His sentiments for his parents, akin to that of an infant yearning for its mother's bosom, carried over to their grave and the land yonder under the sky where they rest. This innate sentiment, true and without pretense, is the very source of Buddha Dharma. Later, men paid tribute by building a temple on the grounds naming it *Shishin-kaku*, [the shrine of yearning for one's parents]. This name truly befits who the Venerable Master really was, and it is the essence of the Lotus Sūtra.

In part to bid farewell [to Nichiren Daishōnin] before embarking on my mission abroad, I carried the relics of my late mother, Maha Bhiksuni Gyōain Nisso, on my back and paid homage at Mount Minobu. Reverend Kaijō Komatsu of Takei-bō and Reverend Nichiun Uchino of Shimizu-bō,¹⁵ who have always been kind, must have particularly sympathized with my sentiments at leaving in solitude with little more than the clothes on my back for a land far beyond the wide ocean to spread the five and seven characters of Myō Hō Ren Ge Kyō,¹⁶ a mission I am ready to lay down my life for. Feeling pity for my recent loss and for the fact that I would leave her grave behind as I set out for a distant land from which I may never return, they allowed me to bury a part of my mother's ash by erecting a tomb in the grand grounds of *Shishin-kaku* atop Mount Minobu, and perform a commemorative service.

If not for the inexplicable compassion of our great Teacher, Nichiren Daishōnin, how could I ever be favored with such grace? Can there be any other expedient that clearly substantiates the enlightenment of women? Benefiting from our great founder's overflowing virtue of filial piety, I was able to accomplish a fraction of his virtue of filial piety. The sacred grounds of *Shishin-kaku*, where our great founder pined for the grave of his parents, have become the sacred grounds of *Shishin-kaku*, where I yearn for my mother's grave. The three characters of *shi*,¹⁷ *shin*,¹⁸ *kaku*¹⁹ have opened the great path for enlightenment for the

14 方向 of his homeland of Bōshū 房州. Nichiren Daishōnin climbed the six-kilometer, treacherous path to the peak of the mountain from his hermitage just to look in the direction of his homeland.

15 小松雨淨庵、内野日蓮庵、武井坊 清水坊. *Bō* signifies a residence for monks, and these are names of monks' residences at Mount Minobu.

16 総法華華経の五字七字.

17 思. Evoke a heartfelt remembrance.

18 親. Parent(s).

19 廟. Shrine or temple.

holy and the ordinary alike.

On March 14, I visited Mount Minobu to bid farewell before my mission abroad. I visited Mount Minobu for the second time on July 15. With my third and final visit coming August 25,²⁰ I will leave my mother's ash in the care of the great founder and finally embark from Mount Minobu for my journey abroad to spread the Dharma with nothing to hold me back. Though there is lingering sadness to bid farewell, I shall sever all personal sentiments for the sake of spreading the Buddha Dharma. May you [Nichiren Daishōnin] have pity on my overreaching vow and allow me to achieve it.

May I be the harbinger of the Buddha Dharma of Japan, ushering its return to India, in the Western Heavens.²¹ May I overcome the 62 distorted views²² to regenerate the spiritual civilization of Asia. May I emancipate all living beings equally from the inferno of delusion that is replete with strife and hostilities perpetuated by Europe and the United States, that realm of *asuras*,²³ that civilization of murder. Follow me, one after another, to beat the poisonous drum²⁴ in the snow-capped Himalayas and pour the

20 When Guruji bid farewell three times at Mount Minobu, it followed the rites depicted in Chapter II, *Expedients* 方便品, and Chapter XVI of the Lotus Sūtra, *The Eternal Duration of the Life of the Tathāgata* 如來壽量品, in proclaiming the vow thrice to the Buddha.

21 Nichiren Daishōnin's *Kangyō-hachiman-shō* 諫曉八幡抄 *Admonishing Bodhisattva Hachiman* contains the prophecy that just as the Buddha Dharma migrated from India to Japan, the Buddha Dharma of Japan will return westward to India.

Saiten-kaikyō 西天開教 is Guruji's vow to return Buddha's teachings to *Saiten*, the Western Heavens, which was also the fulfillment of Nichiren Daishōnin's prophecy.

Saiten includes *Tenjiku* 天竺, an ancient name for India. At the time Guruji set out for the Western Heavens in 1930, the British colony of India covered a vast geographical area spanning from the Himalayas bordering on Tibet in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south, including Sri Lanka and part of the Malay Peninsula, and spanned westward to Hindu Kush Mountains.

22 *Rokujūni-ken* 六十二見. Originally, they were the 62 non-Buddhist schools of philosophy and metaphysics at the time of Buddha Śākyamuni. They are roughly divided into two categories: the view that everything is permanent and the view that death is the end of all existence. They can be further subdivided into 62 thoughts.

23 *Asura* originally is a Hindu god, an evil spirit, who is constantly fighting with Indra. In Buddhism it is a demigod, generally considered an evil and fearsome spirit fond of fighting, but some are considered to be good spirits and protectors of Buddhism. *Asura* is a state of existence where strife and battles abound.

24 *Dokku* 毒鼓 is the poisonous drum as opposed to *tenku* 天鼓 the celestial drum. The sound of the Dharma drum can be either the celestial drum for those who are joyous upon hearing it or the poisonous drum for those who are averse to hearing it, depending on their karmic connection to the Dharma. The poisonous drum draws out anger in the heart of the recipient, thereby extinguishing delusion, and becomes a cause for eventual attainment of Buddhahood for both the faithful and the slanderer. As stated in *The Eternal Duration of the Life of the Tathāgata* chapter, the ultimate salvation is to "finally awaken and come back to their right minds."



August 25, 1930 at *Shishin-kaku*, Mt. Minobu before departure to India on the mission of *Saiten-kaikyō*.

Dharma rain into the stream of the Ganges.

If this Dharma is not returned to the Western Heavens, the prophecy of our great founder becomes smeared in mud. If this Dharma is not returned to the Western Heavens, our Bodhisattva practice will not hold true. If this Dharma is not returned to the Western Heavens, living beings of this *sahā* world will long be condemned to the gaol of strife and bloodshed. Therefore devas and good protector kings who lend power to the long-cherished aspiration of our great founder, may you graciously grant protection and guard over our practice.

Na Mu Myō Hō Ren Ge Kyō
Na Mu Myō Hō Ren Ge Kyō
Na Mu Myō Hō Ren Ge Kyō

Gyōshō,
Keibyaku [With humility]²⁵

25 敬白. A term used at the end of a written petition to a deity or Buddha. In this case, it is a petition to Nichiren Daishōnin and protector deities.