

## MESSAGE FOR OESHIKI

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To be read every year for Oeshiki

This message is being sent to everyone: those who are able to participate in the meeting and those who are not.

Today is October 13, the day Nichiren Daishonin<sup>1</sup> passed away. He died at 8:00AM on October 13 in the year 1282 at the age of 61. For all of you to get together to do Gongyo<sup>2</sup> and chant daimoku<sup>3</sup> on this day is both sacred and blessed. I and the believers at Sanbo-in in Japan will begin the ceremony at 1:00PM.

Even though this is the day Nichiren Daishonin passed away, we say 'Congratulations for *Oeshiki!*' or 'Happy *Oeshiki!*' The reason for this is that by practicing the austere practices described in the *Juryo* (16<sup>th</sup>) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin demonstrated to us with his life that the True Law is eternal and forever. This is the meaning of *Oeshiki* - this is what we celebrate. Moreover, notwithstanding that our lives undergo birth and death, the True Law is still forever eternal and the lives of those who practice *Myoho-renge-kyo* and do *shakubuku*<sup>4</sup> are also eternal. *Oeshiki* is the most important ceremony of Nichiren Shoshu Buddhism.

In Nichiren Shoshu it is customary for us to make an offering of evergreens—not flowers—to Gohonzon since evergreens symbolize eternal life. However, for *Oeshiki* we offer paper cherry blossoms in addition to evergreens. The reason is this: Shakyamuni's<sup>5</sup> Buddhism originated in India where, during his day, the lotus flower was the national symbol. In the 2,000 years that followed Shakyamuni's demise Mahayana Buddhism traveled from India to China, then to Korea, developing and evolving along the way. From Korea it arrived in Japan

<sup>1</sup> Nichiren Daishonin – (1222-1282) – the founder of true Buddhism known as Nichiren Shoshu who introduced and advocated *Namu-myoho-renge-kyo* (the True Law of Buddhism) as the means by which all mankind can realize Buddhahood.

<sup>2</sup> Gongyo – recitation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Lotus Sutra

<sup>3</sup> Daimoku – The title of a sutra, specifically the title of the Lotus Sutra, *Myoho-renge-kyo*.

<sup>4</sup> Shakubuku – compassionately teaching others about true Buddhism.

<sup>5</sup> Shakyamuni – (1029 B.C. – 949 B.C.) the historical Buddha born in India.

where, because of Nichiren Daishonin, it finally ripened, or reached its perfection, during the age of *Mappo*<sup>6</sup> which began 2,000 years after the death of Shakyamuni. Buddhism's progress can be compared to the cherry tree which first blossoms then bears fruit: Buddhism blossomed in India and reached fruition in Japan. In Japan the cherry blossom is the national symbol. [Moreover at the time of Nichiren Daishonin's death, though it was mid autumn, the cherry blossoms bloomed throughout the country.]

The formal Oeshiki ceremony consists of recitation of the sutra book through the prose section of the 16<sup>th</sup> (*Juryo*) chapter, pausing before reciting the *Jigage*<sup>7</sup> to read letters aloud in the following order:

- 1) The *shakubuku* letter of Nichiu Shonin (d. 1482) written to the Kamakura Shogunate.
- 2) Nichiren Daishonin's *Rissho Ankoku Ron*<sup>8</sup> read by the priest.
- 3) Nichiren Daishonin's *shakubuku* letter written to the Kamakura Shogunate.
- 4) Second High Priest Nikko Shonin's (d. 1333) *shakubuku* letter
- 5) Third High Priest Nichimoku Shonin's (d. 1333) *shakubuku* letter
- 6) Fourth High Priest Nichido Shonin's (d. 1341) *shakubuku* letter and
- 7) Fifth High Priest Nichigyo Shonin's (d. 1369) *shakubuku* letter.

You may wonder why 9<sup>th</sup> High Priest Nichiu Shonin's letter is read before Nichiren Daishonin's, Nikko Shonin's and the other early high priests. It is because Nichiu Shonin was the first to compile all of the remonstrations of Nichiren Daishonin, Nikko Shonin and other high priests into one volume and submit it to the Kamakura Shogunate. And since the most important people are those living, believing and practicing true Buddhism and doing *shakubuku* in the present, it is therefore more appropriate that the most recent high priest's letter is read first as his is the most relevant for the times.

Nichiren Daishonin, throughout his life, practiced *Myoho-enge-kyo* to realize enlightenment. What he said was, you must abandon any religion that does not lead directly to enlightenment. You must practice the Mystic Law and perceive enlightenment yourself. You must believe in *Myoho-enge-kyo* or you will

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<sup>6</sup> Mappo – The Latter Day of the Law – began in 1052 A.D. and will last for 10,000 years or more.

<sup>7</sup> Jigage – verse section of the 16<sup>th</sup> (*Juryo*) chapter.

<sup>8</sup> Rissho Ankoku Ron – “Securing the Peace of the Land Through the Propagation of True Buddhism”

never achieve peace. That is what he wrote in the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and submitted to the Kamakura government in the year 1260.

After he submitted the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* to the Shogunate government Daishonin was exiled to Izu Peninsula, suffered the Komatsubara persecution, was nearly beheaded at Tatsunokuchi and was exiled to Sado Island. All the persecutions and abuses he endured were predicted in the Lotus Sutra (*Myohorenge-kyo*). His life was proof of the veracity of the Lotus Sutra.

The last eight years of the Daishonin's life were spent on Mount Minobu. Towards the end of his life his health had declined so that he set out for the hot springs in Ibaragi where he hoped for a cure. Along the way he stopped at wayside inns where, at each inn, he gave lectures on the *Rissho Anoku Ron*. At the last, instead of going on to the hot springs, Daishonin elected to be taken to the home of Munenaka Ikegami where, despite his waning strength which necessitated that he lean against a pillar, he still gave lectures on the *Rissho Anoku Ron*. That is why they say, "Daishonin's life began with the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* and ended with the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*." His determination demonstrated to everyone the imperative to do *shakubuku*.

To conclude, Oeshiki has two meanings: First it is a celebration of Nichiren Daishonin's eternal life. Second it is an affirmation of the spirit of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, reminding successive generations to follow the spirit of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*.

I urge everyone who attends this meeting today to please deepen your faith to do *shakubuku* and to cultivate the same spirit as Nichiren Daishonin.

Please take care.

Congratulations!

Reverend Raidou Hirota

To every follower of the Shoshin-kai