

New Year's Address

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin

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As we welcome the New Year, the 772nd since the establishment of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I am delighted to see Nichiren Shoshu priests and lay believers all greeting the New Year in good spirits and with renewed resolve to further advance in faith and practice.

This year's slogan—and our course of action for 2024—is the “Year of Further Progress in Shakubuku.” Let's make it a truly significant year, one of great progress in our quest to bring about kosen-rufu! In a spirit of repaying our debt of gratitude to the three treasures of true Buddhism, let's focus all our energy into putting shakubuku into practice, priesthood and laity unanimously united, many in body, one in mind with Nichiren Daishonin!

The reason is simple. All you need to do is look at the world today—in particular, the situation in the wake of the lingering COVID pandemic—through the lens of Buddhism. In the *Rissho ankoku-ron* (On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism), Nichiren Daishonin elucidates:

...All people have gone against the correct Law and become wholly devoted to evil doctrines. This is why all the guardian deities have abandoned this country and sages have left this land, not to return. Seizing this opportunity, devils and demons rush in, bringing disasters and calamities. This is most fearful. We must speak out!

(*Gosho*, p. 234; *The Gosho of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 2, p. 3)

His opening words, “All people have gone against the correct Law and become wholly devoted to evil doctrines,” are clear. We need to realize that at the root of the world's misfortune is the toxin of people's slander (*hobo*); namely, their rejecting the correct teaching and instead following false doctrines.

Given this perspective, though we are many in body, it is essential that we, priests and lay followers alike, be of one mind and concentrate all our energy on advancing the worldwide propagation of the mystic Law.

In “Questions and Answers between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man” (“*Shogu mondo-sho*”), the Daishonin states:

To bestow benefit upon all people through the propagation of Buddhism, one first must have a thorough understanding of the teaching, capacity, time, country, and

sequence of propagation. As for the periods [of propagation], there are the Former, Middle, and Latter Days of the Law. As for the Law, there are both Mahayana and Hinayana teachings. As for the practices, there are shoju and shakubuku. If one carries out shakubuku during the period when shoju should be practiced, this will be inappropriate. On the other hand, if one performs the practice of shoju during the era when shakubuku must be used, this will be an offense. Thus, it is of foremost importance to know first whether the present time is for shoju or shakubuku. The time to practice shoju is when the Lotus Sutra spreads throughout the nation and there is not a single evil teaching or master. At that time, one should withdraw to the forests and devote oneself to the practice of observing one's mind and the Law, carrying out the practices such as the five practices, the six practices, and the ten practices. However, during the time of shakubuku, one should not act in this manner. When erroneous doctrines of various sects become rampant and compete against each other, gaining acclaim by taking the stance that their respective doctrines are superior to others; and when incorrect teachings are viewed as equal to the correct Law, and Mahayana and Hinayana followers fight with each other over what is correct—this is the time, above all else, to refute these slanderers. This is the practice of shakubuku. The Lotus Sutra and the Nirvana Sutra both state that if one is unaware of this principle and is mistaken about the implementation of shoju and shakubuku, one will be far removed from receiving the benefit of attaining Buddhahood. Rather, one will fall into hell. This is also clearly stated in the interpretations provided by Tiantai and Miaole. What I mention here is critical in conducting Buddhist practices.

(*Gosho*, p. 402)

In light of this passage, and in view of the current turmoil in Japan and the world today, we need to realize that now, as at no other time, is when each of us needs to take action, steadfast in the conviction that we are refuting errant teachings and proclaiming the correct one, and translate into practice the Daishonin's mandate found in "On Practicing according to the Buddha's Teachings" (*Nyosetsu shugyo-sho*) where he writes:

Whomever you may meet, conduct shakubuku to the people and refute the teachings of the other sects. Proclaim repeatedly with all your might that the Lotus Sutra is the only teaching that will lead the people to Buddhahood, and that the various other teachings obstruct them from attaining enlightenment and are the root cause for leading them to fall into hell.

(*Gosho*, p. 673)

In closing, let me say that I sincerely hope you will etch this passage into your hearts, and that the many members of your temples will be of one mind in aiming towards kosen-rufu of the whole world. I look forward to your waging a great campaign of courageous shakubuku so that you and all humanity can achieve Buddhahood in this lifetime!