

Myosetsuji News

ISSUE 227

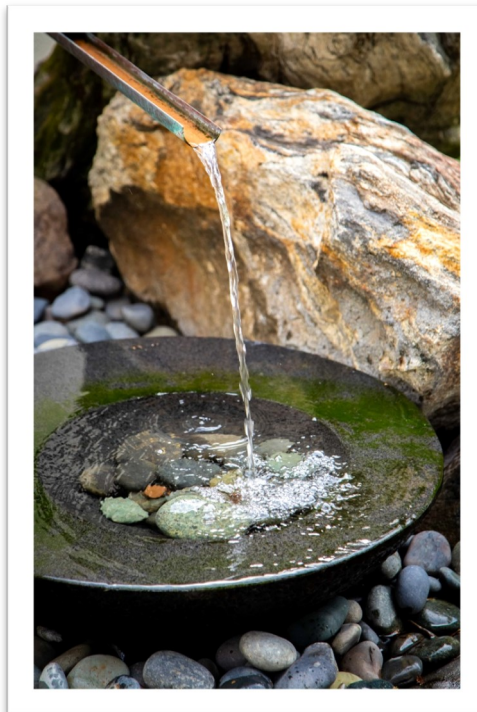
MAY 1, 2020

GUIDANCE FROM SIXTY-EIGHTH HIGH PRIEST NICHINYO SHONIN

On the Occasion of the March Kosen-rufu Shodai Ceremony

On this occasion of the March Kosen-rufu Shodai Ceremony, conducted here today at the Head Temple, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to all of you for making a pilgrimage to the Head Temple with profound faith to participate in the Kosen-rufu Shodai Ceremony.

In particular now, with the rampant, new coronavirus spreading in Japan and around the world, I strongly feel that once again, we must revere the Daishonin's true intention of submitting the *Rissho ankoku-ron* (On Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism), and then devote ourselves to propagate Myoho-Renge-Kyo, based on unity in the



spirit of *itai doshin*.

It was 760 years ago, on July 16th of the first year of Bunno (1260), that the *Rissho ankoku-ron* was submitted by our Founder Nichiren Daishonin at the age of 39, through Yadoya-zaemon nyudo to Hojo Tokiyori, the most powerful government official at that time. It is a treatise in which he remonstrated with the all-powerful sovereign.

In this writing, the Daishonin expressed his deep concern over the tragic situation that everyone in Japan from the ruler down to the commoners was facing. This included continuing unusual occurrences in the heavens, natural disasters on earth, famine, and epidemics—virulent epidemics like today's new coronavirus infection. Out of deep

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Gosho Quote for May 2020

Letter to Ni'ike

It is said that the Kankucho bird in the Snow Mountains suffers the cold at night, and cries out it will build a nest after dawn. But when the sun rises, it is lulled to sleep in the warmth of the morning sun, and again, does not build its nest. For its whole life, it keeps screeching in vain. The same applies to humans. Upon falling into hell, we suffer in anguish in raging fires, yearning to be reborn as a human so that we can make offerings to the three treasures before everything else and attain enlightenment in the future. However, when we happen to be reborn as a human, the wind of desire for fame and fortune blows fiercely, easily extinguishing our light of determination for Buddhist practice. (*Gosho, P.1457*)

GUIDANCE FROM SIXTY-EIGHTH HIGH PRIEST NICHINYO SHONIN (CONTINUED)

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compassion as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, the Daishonin presented this shakubuku treatise, and remonstrated with Hojo Tokiyori as well as all the people of Japan. The *Rissho ankoku-ron* is a treatise that sees through peace and war, and the rise and fall of the nation. It also is a clear mirror reflecting the future of Japan and illuminating the three existences of past, present and future. Precisely, it is stated in the Goshō as follows:

This treatise is superior to Bai Juyi's collection of poems [that criticized the government during the Tang dynasty in China]. It also is no less than the prophecies of Shakyamuni Buddha. (*Goshō*, p. 1055)

In the *Rissho ankoku-ron*, the Daishonin admonishes that in order to prevent a series of calamities and instead establish the Buddha land:

You must immediately renounce your erroneous belief and take faith in the supreme teaching of the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra. Then, this entire threefold world will become the Buddha land. (*Goshō*, p. 250)

The Daishonin warns us that in order to secure the peace of the land, we must sever our attachments to erroneous doctrines without delay,



and take faith in “the supreme teaching of the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra.”

The Daishonin's true intention behind “the supreme teaching of the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra” does not indicate the surface meaning of the words of the Lotus Sutra. Rather, it refers to Myōhō-Renge-Kyō, hidden in the depths of the Life Span chapter of the Lotus Sutra—the sole essential teaching. It is the supreme Three Great Secret Laws, the Dai-Gohonzon of the Essential Teaching. In other words, the clause, “take faith in the supreme teaching of the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra” is synonymous with “*risshō*” (propagating true Buddhism—establishing the correct doctrine) [of *Rissho ankoku-ron*]. In order to ensure the security of the land, it is absolutely essential that all people throughout the country sever their attachments to erroneous doctrines and take faith in the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws.

The Daishonin teaches the following in the Goshō, *A Comparison between the Lotus Sutra and Other Sutras* (Shōkyō to hōkekyō to nan-i no koto):

When Buddhism becomes corrupted, society becomes defiled and chaotic. Buddhism is like the body and society like the shadow. When the body is twisted, so is the shadow. (*Goshō*, p. 1469)

As these golden words indicate, the root cause for the world to become chaotic is solely due to the collapse of Buddhism. That is because people go against the true Law and instead believe in heretical doctrines. If people take faith in erroneous teachings, the minds of the people become distorted. If people's minds become distorted, this will have a significant effect on the



realm of the environment.

The Daishonin teaches in the Goshō, *On Omens* (Zuisō-goshō) as follows:

The ten directions are the objective environment, while living beings are the subjective self. The objective environment is like the shadow, and the subjective self is like the body. (*Goshō*, p. 918)

In Buddhism, the principle of the oneness of life and its environment is taught and, it signifies that life, the subjective self, and its physical environment are not two but one. Therefore, every function of all living beings, which signifies the subjective self, has a great impact on the realm of environment, the objective environment.

The Daishonin teaches in the same Goshō, as follows:

Then the people's eyes, ears and

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GUIDANCE FROM SIXTY-EIGHTH HIGH PRIEST NICHINYO SHONIN (*CONTINUED*)

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other sense organs are disturbed and disordered, extraordinary changes occur in the heavens, and when their minds are troubled, the earth shakes. (ibid., p. 919)

Furthermore, the Daishonin teaches as follows:

If the people are filled with joy, a good omen will manifest in the heavens, and the Heavenly King Taishaku will work to protect the people in the land. On the contrary, if the people have strong evil minds, unusual occurrences will manifest in the heavens, and natural disasters will occur on earth. (ibid., p. 920)

The principle of the oneness of life and its environment is based on the absolute, penetrating wisdom of the Buddha, who perceived the immeasurable time and space of the three existences and ten directions. Thus, there is no real solution for the miserable and extremely catastrophic conditions of the world today, unless one takes into consideration the great principle of the oneness of life and its environment. This principle was revealed by the Daishonin from the perspective of Myoho-Renge-Kyo



In light of the Daishonin's intention conveyed in the *Rissho ankoku-ron*, if all people, the subjective self, discard all slanderous ideas and take faith in the Gohonzon of the Essential Teaching—the Three Great Secret Laws of the supreme teaching of the one vehicle of the Lotus Sutra—then each of our lives will be purified due to the power and function of Myoho-Renge-Kyo, which is unfathomable and immeasurable. This purification will extend from the individual to the whole, and to the realm of living beings, thus purifying the society. Eventually, the realm of the environment will be reformed and become the Buddha land.

On the contrary, if our lives are defiled by evil doctrines, our clouded minds will pervade the entire society. This will lead to various manifestations throughout the land, such as unusual occurrences in the heavens and natural disasters on earth.

This is the principle taught in the *Rissho ankoku-ron*. Keeping in mind the Daishonin's intention conveyed in this treatise, we must devote ourselves to propagate the true Law, aiming toward real world peace and the realization of the Buddha land. This is the important mission of the priesthood and laity of Nichiren Shoshu. Herein lies the significance for us to exert our utmost efforts in achieving our goal of the establishment of a membership of 800,000 Hokkeko believers.

The last sentence of the *Rissho ankoku-ron* states:

Not only will I take faith in the correct Law, but I will also refute the erroneous views of others (*Gosho*, p. 250)

We have only one year remaining until the auspicious occasion of the 800th anniversary of the advent of our Founder Nichiren Daishonin. Keeping these golden words in our hearts, each of us must refute heresy and do shaku-



buku in order to purify the extremely chaotic world today, in the defiled age of the Latter Day of the Law, aiming toward the realization of the happiness of all mankind and the establishment of the true Buddha land, not to mention the realization of the individual's happiness. I sincerely wish each of you will take to heart that this is the most important thing for us to do now and make further great advancement toward the achievement of our goal.

I then wish that all chapters will achieve their shakubuku goals so that they can report to the three treasures with great joy.

EXPERIENCE BY JOSÉ ANTONIO CARMONA JR. FROM SEPTEMBER 2013 NEWSLETTER

The Daishonin stated in "Repaying Debts of Gratitude" (ho-on sho):

Those who practice Buddhism must repay the four debts of gratitude without fail. (Gosho, p. 267; cf. MW, vol. 5, p. 8).

In "Letter to Lord Ueno", Nichiren Daishonin said:

What are the four debts of gratitude in Buddhism? First, we repay our debts of gratitude to our parents, second to our sovereign, third, to all living beings, and fourth, to the Three Treasures. (Gosho, p. 922).

The Gosho of Nichiren Daishonin, Volume II, p. 43, *Rissho Ankoku Ron* ("Treatise on Securing the Peace of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism").

"Not only will I take faith in the correct Law, but I will also refute the erroneous views of others!"

Hello. My name is José Antonio Carmona Jr. I'm 52 years old and I'm serving sentences of life without parole and 30 years. I've been incarcerated since 1991, however, this past year has been the MOST amazing in my life! I want to begin by thanking our Koto Dennis Haggerty for clarifying to me several years ago the true purpose of my present incarceration. Dennis informed me that it's our noble mission as practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism to perform shakubuku. Since he told me this, I have taken it to heart and have made it a point to look at every occasion, conversation, and every meeting as an opportunity to introduce that person or persons to Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism! Thank you Dennis!

On April 28, 2012 I received the benefit of being conferred an Omamori Gohonzon. My most vivid memory of the Conferral Ceremony is of Gojushoku Takikawa gently laying the envelope containing the Omamori Gohonzon onto the open Liturgy in my hands, then, leaning forward and looking directly into my eyes he

said in a low voice that was meant only for me to hear: "You need to chant more!" It was one of the most powerful moments I have ever experienced, and one that I'll never forget! I accepted Gojushoku Takikawa's advice, and cranked up my Daimoku by 100%! Since then AMAZING things have happened not only in my life, but also in the lives of my family members and several of my friends in here!!

One of my most personal and certainly most precious of prayers for the last 13 years is the shakubuku of my entire family. When I last reported to you, I informed you that my 72-year-old mother Bany had made the determination to begin chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. Well, not only has she continued chanting Daimoku, but on August 12, 2012, four months after my being conferred the Omamori Gohonzon, and due to the generosity of the Temple and its members, she and one of my nephews were given a ride to Myosetsuji, thanks to Pennsylvania member Steven Paiano, and BOTH she and my nephew received Gojukai!

But, it DIDN'T end there! On March 30, 2013 our former Assistant Reverend Iwakiri came to this facility to perform the Gojukai Ceremony for three men, however due to adverse weather conditions neither he, our Koto nor the Team Members were permitted to enter the prison. However, Rev. Iwakiri, Koto Dennis did make it to my mother's house, and my brother Diego, who is terminally ill and bedridden, was able to receive Gojukai! There is no doubt that my family's karma is changing for the better, and even those family members who have refused to embrace Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism now have a Poison Drum relationship with True Buddhism and they WILL in time attain enlightenment! I thank the Dai-Gohonzon every day!!

This past New Year's Eve, I was fortunate to be without a cellmate, and I made the determination to per-

form a vigorous *Gantan* (New Year's) Gongyo at 12:00 midnight. I must admit that I almost missed it. I was tired, and lay down on my bunk a half hour before midnight and fell into a half-sleep stupor. However, New Year's Gongyo was going to be performed no matter how tired I was! In prison convicts have a tradition of bringing in the new year by "kicking" on the cell doors. This New Year's Eve ONLY ONE convict kicked on the door, and he kicked it only ONCE, but it was loud enough to wake me several minutes before midnight, and I was able to prepare the little altar that I have in my cell for the Omamori Gohonzon, and I was wide awake as I began to chant my most vigorous Gongyo to date! I was happy knowing that as I chanted and prayed that I was performing New Year's Gongyo with many members across the East Coast and the ENTIRE world on New Year's 2013!

Five days later a Honduran brother appeared at my cell door asking if I was the "resident Buddhist." I invited him in my cell and we spoke of the Buddhism he was familiar with, and I introduced him to Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism. I then asked him if he'd like to join me in chanting Daimoku, and he has been chanting with me ever since. On April 27, 2013 he received Gojukai!

I informed John de Clef Piñeiro, Myosetsuji Temple's Prison Liaison, and he informed me that what had occurred with my New Year's Gongyo was that I had "esho funied" my environment. I NEVER expected that to happen, however I know it to be true! John has been the source of much counsel and advice since our first meeting which has helped me to continue to progress in my Buddhist practice. John recently taught me the words "Gojushoku", which means "Chief Priest", and "Gozonshi", which means "Assistant Priest". Thank you, John!

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EXPERIENCE BY JOSÉ ANTONIO CARMONA JR. FROM SEPTEMBER 2013 NEWSLETTER (*CONTINUED*)

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Not long after my esho funi meeting, a tall black man sat in the area where I used to sit when I watched TV (I've since stopped watching TV in order to dedicate more time to my study and practice, and to make available the Omamori Gohonzon to the two brothers, who received Gojukai and live on the same cell block as I do). Being in prison, one is always careful with whom one speaks, and I held back from speaking to this new person, knowing that if he remained sitting where I had sat that we'd eventually speak and that I'd shakubuku him! I later discovered that he was Panamanian, and spoke Spanish. After our introduction, we had a conversation that I found to be truly amazing. When I steered the topic of our conversation to Buddhism, he immediately informed me that his mother had chanted "Nam Myoho Renge Kyo"! I was flabbergasted and asked if he practiced. He told me that he used to, but hadn't in a while.

I told him that our meeting at this prison facility was no coincidence, and that it was our karma to meet for we must have some karmic connection to each other. I invited him to chant Daimoku (Shodai) with me that evening, and he agreed to chant with me. Later that evening, we, together with my Honduran shakubuku chanted vigorous Daimoku before the Omamori Gohonzon. Afterward, I invited my Panamanian shakubuku to the meeting scheduled for the 27th, and he said that he'd be there. We were preparing for three men to receive Gojukai on the 27th, at the chapel, and after Gozonshi Nomura set up the altar and enshrined the Gohonzon, I asked my Panamanian shakubuku if he wanted to receive Gojukai with the other brothers, and I'm happy to report that he said "Yes!" The Power of Nam Myoho Renge Kyo is truly AMAZING! This was my EASIEST shakubuku to date!

For twelve years, I had sat in my

cell, alone, facing east towards Japan, the Head Temple Taisekiji, and the Dai-Gohonzon to perform morning and evening Gongyo and Daimoku, KNOWING without any doubt whatsoever that ALL my prayers would be answered. I must admit that I didn't think it would take as long as it has; however, I know that it took as long as it did due to my deep negative karma.

After being conferred the Omamori Gohonzon, my fortune changed DRAMATICALLY, and to date most of my prayers have been fulfilled, and I thank the Dai-Gohonzon and the Omamori Gohonzon EVERY DAY!!

This past year I've been fortunate to chant before the Omamori Gohonzon, and I no longer chant alone in the cell, and it's truly an exhilarating experience, as you all well know, to chant with fellow believers before a Gohonzon in Itai-Doshin. Two men, Gojukaied members from the Minersville Members' Group, have already been released from prison, one from Connecticut, and the other from Mexico, and are back home with their loved ones. I am so happy for them! They will forever remain in my prayers. Thank you guys for chanting with me while you were here!

Another generosity of our Temple and its members was the wonderful benefit of six Shinnyo magazines that are helping us to understand a little more of the profundity of Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism. They each contain lectures of various topics on Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism, given by various priests from around the world. The most special is issue #29, February 2004. It has twelve (12!) lectures on the Risho Ankoku Ron, and I'm wearing it out from all the time I spend reading and studying it! Thank you, Susanna Kunkel!

I want to also thank the other two brothers who received Gojukai on April 27th. I want you men of the Minersville Members' Group to

know that it's my Honor to know you, and to chant Gongyo and Daimoku with you before the Omamori Gohonzon. I respectfully ask that if I EVER say or do ANYTHING that makes you feel uncomfortable to PLEASE let me know immediately. I'm only human, and I will make mistakes, only I NEVER want to make ANY mistakes when it comes to the doctrines of Nichiren Shoshu! Rest assured that I WILL correct myself. My prayer is that the Dai-Gohonzon blesses you guys as It has found fit to bless me and my family! I am DOUBLY blessed to have gotten to know you guys! Thank you!

EVERYONE that I have encountered in my return journey to True Buddhism since 2000 have had a positive influence in my life. And even those who have brought a certain level of negativity to my life (that cannot be avoided sometimes in this prison environment) have ALL taught me valuable lessons that have enabled me to reflect on my life, the causes that landed me in prison, and my practice; and to be able to immediately correct myself when I'm wrong or when I wrong someone, and to have a more heightened awareness to ALL the causes I make DAILY in my life. THANK YOU ALL!!

The Daishonin states:

Three things are needed: a good master, a good believer, and a good doctrine before prayer will be effective and disasters will be banished from the land. (Gosho p. 1314; cf. MW, vol. 6, p. 193)

Sincerely and Respectfully Submitted, José Antonio Carmona Jr.

EXPERIENCE BY JOSÉ ANTONIO CARMONA JR. FROM NOVEMBER 2018 NEWSLETTER

Good morning Chief Priest Takikawa, Asst. Priest Mitani, Koto Dennis, all Myosetsuji Temple members and honored guests. For those of you who don't know me, I want to introduce myself. My name is José, and I've been a proud member of Myosetsuji Temple since October 11, 2011. The best moment of my life was when I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's True Buddhism in 1980, while serving in the United States Army in Germany. Little did I know then the wonderfully far-reaching Positive impact that my karma had brought into my life due to this introduction!

However, my introduction was admittedly lacking, and, instead of receiving the FULL range of benefits that this practice offers each and every one of us, I practiced alone, because that's all I knew. Upon my discharge from the Army, I failed to seek out other members and I permitted myself to become distracted and overwhelmed by "life". I can still recall the day that I threw my prayer beads out the car window and watched as they skidded across the street and slid into a sewer drain. Little did I know that my very existence, and the path that my life had been on, was dramatically altered that day because of the grievous slander I had just committed.

I want to tell you about the next time that my life changed for the best, although AT THE TIME I believed it to be the absolute WORST. On August 21, 1991 I was arrested, subsequently prosecuted, and in the end, sentenced to Life without parole plus 30 years in a United States federal penitentiary. The first nine (9) years my life in prison were pure Hell. In the year 2000, I was at the federal penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia, and that's when I FINALLY got TIRED of living in that state of hell. I did what many other prisoners tend to do when it seems that they're at the end of their rope, in search of peace of mind, I wrote a letter to Myosenji Temple in Silver Spring, Maryland.

My previous experience with Nichiren Shoshu was a good one, and I immediately ordered juzu beads and a Sutra Book/Liturgy. When they arrived, For Me, it was as if those beads

and Liturgy that I threw into the sewer had returned. However, this time, I was in the "sewer" and the beads and Liturgy came to save my life. As you must imagine, my very first prayer was for my freedom. It took me one year to LET GO of all the negativity that I had attached myself to in prison, and the benefit from that was that I no longer was having negative encounters with my fellow inmates or the prison staff, and I wasn't going to "the Hole" anymore! ("The hole" is inmate-speak for being sent to a punitive segregation unit of the prison.)

The following nine years of my life sentence were spent in practice and study. I did introduce others to the practice; however, my efforts were shy, and hesitant. I thought myself to be incapable of performing effective shakubuku because I was alone and lacking in experience. During this time period, I was bounced around to a couple different penitentiaries, and I chanted abundant Daimoku and I read and studied everything I could get my hands on. I also attempted to have the priest come to the prison to perform my Gojukai Ceremony, that is, my formal initiation to the practice. I wanted to receive Gojukai so badly; it was truly a deep yearning for me. My attempts, however, were unsuccessful. It just wasn't the right time.

It was in the sixteenth year of my "life" sentence that I had exhausted the LAST of my judicial remedies with the federal courts. The U.S. Supreme Court DENIED my last available motion, and there is no one to appeal to from this denial. It was "the End of the Road" for me. While it was a bitter pill to swallow, I had to accept that I was going to die in prison. As I sat on my bunk chanting Daimoku, and accepting this circumstance in my life, I was comforted by the fact that I was practicing the Highest Teachings of the True Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, and that I would also, in time, attain enlightenment. As I faced the wall, I promised the Dai-Gohonzon that I would continue my practice no matter what happened, even if I did have to spend the rest of my life in prison. I also promised that I would continue chanting Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo until my last breath.

And there was still that first prayer for my freedom that I made in the year 2000, so not all hope or faith was lost!

On my eighteenth year of incarceration, I was transferred to a prison in Pennsylvania. It was at this prison that I met Chaplain Oscar Brown, who, one day, out of the blue, asked me if the Temple would send volunteers to the prison. I was thrilled and immediately contacted the Temple. BIG changes were about to happen, but I just didn't know how big.

In a letter to me our Koto Dennis informed me that it is our profound mission in this life to perform shakubuku. Being embarrassed about my shakubuku efforts thus far, I contemplated his words. I chanted about it and prayed that I would successfully perform my first shakubuku. I did. My first shakubuku's name is Miguel. He was a gang-banger, and a member of the Latin Kings Nation. I understand that Miguel and I were the first men in the history of Nichiren Shoshu to receive the Gojukai Ceremony while incarcerated.

Incarceration is everything you've probably heard about, and more. I'm not here to talk about that though. What I want to tell you is that my fortune changed so much that I am also the first incarcerated individual ever to be conferred an Omamori Gohonzon. I've been told that this is a first in the history of Nichiren Shoshu. Being conferred the Omamori Gohonzon was a LIFE CHANGING event. At the Conferral Ceremony, I recall Chief Priest Takikawa leaning towards me and saying: "You need to chant more!" These five words were powerful, and I accepted the guidance of my direct master and chanted even more.

Six months after I received the Omamori Gohonzon, my mother Bany received Gojukai. It was one of my MANY prayers that had finally been fulfilled. During this time my brother Diego was told by his doctors that he would soon succumb to his illness, and to prepare for the day of his passing. My brother had AIDS. However, several months after my mother's Gojukai Ceremony, my brother received

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EXPERIENCE BY JOSÉ ANTONIO CARMONA JR. FROM NOVEMBER 2018 NEWSLETTER (*CONTINUED*)

Gojukai on his "death bed." These Gojukai Ceremonies were a fulfillment of my prayers for my family, and many other family members have since met the Gohonzon and been introduced to the Supreme Invocation Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

These were debts of love and gratitude repaid. Oh, and my brother Diego? He outlived the doctors' diagnosis by living and thriving for several more years!

I began to perform shakubuku in earnest, with pride, and more importantly, with Courage. I was grateful for the time I spent in practice and study because it prepared me for what was to come, along with the many hours (hundreds, thousands??) that I chanted Daimoku (what we call "Shodai"). During this time, nine more fellow inmates received the Gojukai Ceremony, and hundreds of others learned about the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

In 2016, a program was initiated by the White House in order to release federal prisoners who had served decades for non-violent crimes. Clemency would be granted to those who met certain criteria. At the time, I couldn't believe that I would ever be granted clemency because my application had been previously denied. But a fellow inmate named Sean, who knew my case, strongly encouraged me to read the criteria. Having read the criteria, I believed that this was truly my last opportunity for freedom. I submitted the required form and waited. I was subsequently appointed an attorney who prepared the Clemency Request for me. I want to take this time to thank Reverend Takikawa, Koto Dennis, John, Steven, and my mother Bany, all of whom submitted letters on my behalf. Thank you all!

As I waited for the decision from President Obama, life went on. I was still serving a life sentence plus 30 years; however, I was lucky in that one of my shakubukus who had received Gojukai, Omay, was now my cell mate. We chanted EVERY day together, and he will always be my brother, as you are all my Family.

In prison, I really didn't watch the television; however, I would, once in a while, sit and watch a car renovation show. I love cars. I recall one day watching one of these shows and that I had sat there for two hours when I suddenly recalled Reverend Takikawa's words to me: YOU NEED TO CHANT MORE! I immediately went to my cell and chanted two hours of Daimoku! I determined to equal any time squandered in frivolous activity with chanting Daimoku before the Gohonzon for an equal amount of time.

It was during the years 2015 through 2017 of my incarceration that I began to experience negativity from some inmates and staff. And even some of my shakubukus turned on me. However, I remained firm and did not feed into it. Chaplain Brown was replaced by another chaplain, and this one placed me in the "Hole," after I filed a complaint against him. This incident could have negatively affected my clemency request. I was sanctioned with denial of phone access, visitations, and commissary privileges. During the sixty days that I spent in the Hole, I performed my Morning and Evening Gongyo and chanted an hour of Daimoku EVERY DAY. I also shakubukued every man placed in my cell.

Upon my release from the Hole, I received written guidance from Reverend Takikawa. He encouraged me to forgo any further appeals against the chaplain, and to instead chant. I already had one appeal in, and most, if not all, of these appeals are denied at this initial level. I accepted Reverend Takikawa's guidance without reservation and withdrew my appeal. A couple of months later my prison counselor came rushing to me exclaiming "This is the first time in the eight years that I've been here that I've seen this!" As he handed me some papers, I asked "What are you talking about?" He said, "Your appeal, you won!" It was true. As I read the papers, the decision rendered restored my privileges, and, EXPUNGED the incident report from my record! This meant that my Clemency Request was still in play!

However, sansho shima, those devilish obstacles and functions that seem to

want to sometimes torture us, returned again. And, on September 18, 2016, my mother Bany passed away. But before her passing, I did get to chant with her via the phone.

Then, five months later, on January 19, 2017, as I chanted Morning Gongyo, my counselor interrupted me to inform me that I would receive a legal call from my attorney at 1:30 p.m. It was then 7:30 a.m. I returned to my prayers, and when I reached the second part of the Fourth Prayer, I reported to the Omamori Gohonzon that nothing had changed. That, no matter what I was told at 1:30 p.m., I would not lose my Faith nor stop practicing. My mission in prison would continue. At 1:30 p.m., I was informed by my lawyer that President Obama had GRANTED my Clemency Request. The first prayer that I made, to again have my freedom, was the last to be fulfilled. Every single prayer I had made for my life in prison had been fulfilled.

THIS ladies and gentlemen is the Power of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. One month later, my brother Diego passed away. While admittedly devastating, I was comforted by the fact that both my mother and brother had received Gojukai.

I'm here now, and it's my prayer that this experience of mine will encourage those of you here to give this practice an opportunity to make a difference in your life. You've already made the cause by coming here. Why not stick around for the effect?

One last thing before I close here today. At my Conferral Ceremony, there was a shakubuku named Steven who asked Reverend Takikawa that if he received Gojukai, and in six months discovered that it wasn't for him, could he leave the practice? Reverend Takikawa looked at him and responded by saying: "None of us knows where we'll be in six months." Steven received Gojukai that day, and upon his release from prison became the first former prisoner to receive a Gohonzon as a FREE man.

Where will you be in six months?
Thank you all for listening today.

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