

Komatsubara Persecution

Many times when you have a strong conviction, there are always those who will oppose you. The greater the conviction, the greater the opposition. A monk from western Japan went to the capital of Buddhism which was located at Mt. Hiei in eastern Japan. There he studied to find the true essence of Buddha Sakyamuni's teachings. Many different sects converged on Mt. Hiei to study and debate various theological issues. After several years, this monk found that the Lotus Sutra was the most excellent teaching, the most profound and fitting for this time. This monk was Nichiren Daishonin. To get the message across to all of Japan, the government had to be notified and told of the grave mistake that practicing inferior teachings was leading the country down a path of destruction, famine and wars. The established government did not take kindly to these words and viewed them as threats. The government officials and other prominent members were all followers of Amida Buddha where by praising him during this life time then at death, Amida will take you to the Pure Land in the west. These officials were not going to change their views due to one persistent monk. Nichiren never gave up and gained many converts. Eventually the government saw Nichiren as a trouble maker and began to persecute him and tried to force him to stop. On several occasions, Nichiren should have perished, but through divine intervention, Nichiren always managed to escape. This only bolstered his view that the Lotus Sutra was the most excellent and predicted his current predicament.

Since it is November, Nichiren encountered one of the major episodes which affected his life and his belief during this month. With the government pressuring him and various lords around his home town not fond of him, Nichiren had to be careful.

Many people wanted to silence him and one sure way was through death. There is an old saying, “a dead man tells no tales.” But upon hearing news that his mother was gravely ill, he had to risk his life to go see her. Previously because of the pressure, he was not able to see his father before he passed away. So with a small party of ten, Nichiren set out to his home town. Fortunately, he was able to meet his sick mother without incident. Through the power of the Odaimoku, he was able to heal her.

On his way home, the group was invited to Lord Yoshitaka Kudo’s estate. He was a recent convert and welcomed the prominent guests. Unfortunately, a nearby lord, Kagenobu Tojo disliked Nichiren very much. For over eleven years this hatred festered, ever since Nichiren gave one of his first sermons at Kiyosumi Temple criticizing the Pure Land Sect. Somehow Lord Tojo learned the travel plans of Nichiren’s group and attacked him in a forest near Komatsubara in late evening. This was an unfair fight, samurai warriors versus unarmed monks and followers. One of Nichiren’s disciples was killed instantly and another two were seriously injured. Lord Kudo, fearing that something was wrong, went to go find Nichiren and entered the fight. He was mortally wounded and did not survive. Nichiren too, was not spared. In the melee, Lord Tojo had a clear path towards Nichiren. He galloped at full speed with his sword drawn. Nichiren calmly faced him and as couple legends have it, recited the Odaimoku, lifted his left hand while holding Juzu, which scared the horse and tossed Lord Tojo to the ground, but not before cutting Nichiren on his forehead. The other legend has it that Kishimojin appeared with a frightening face and scared the horse, just in time to throw Lord Tojo off his horse. In any case, the practioner of the Lotus Sutra was saved. Lord Tojo died several days later from his injuries.

In Chapter 10 of the Lotus Sutra there is a passage:
“Many people hate it with jealousy even in my lifetime. Needless to say, more people will do so after my extinction.”

In Chapter 13, describes the three kinds of arrogant enemies. The first one states:
“Ignorant people will speak ill of us, abuse us and threaten us with swords or sticks, but we will endure all this.”

Nichiren was threatened by the sword and survived. If you look at the statue of Nichiren, from November 11th, the date of the Komatsubara Persecution to spring time, a cotton cloth is placed over the head, symbolizing the band aid covering the wound on his forehead. Though this may be seen as part of a ritual, it is also to remind us the sacrifice made to propagate the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. Sacrifice does not come easy. Propagation and teaching does not come easy. We have to constantly persevere and fight through the barriers blocking progress from those who slander the Lotus Sutra.

As we begin to read, recite, copy, keep and expound the Lotus Sutra our faith will grow stronger. We will be rewarded with the protections of the Buddha and various other deities. We do this since we are Bodhisattvas from Underground, willing to expound the teachings of the Buddha and save all beings from suffering and sorrow. Let us all strive to grow our minds and become the protectors of this world.