

Tatsunokuchi Execution

Yesterday was a solemn day as we remember all those who have fallen to the tragedy that happened at the World Trade Center site. Today is September 12th and marks another very important day in history. After this day in 1271, Nichiren Daishonin's life dramatically changed. The incident which caused this change is known as Tatsunokuchi Execution which we just commemorated with a special service.

Nichiren Daishonin was considered to be a nuisance according to the Japanese Military government because he kept refuting the teachings of Nembutsu or Amida Buddha. Nichiren was strong in his conviction that the suffering of the nation was caused by the practice of the wrong teaching of the Buddha and that everyone should switch to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. The governmental leaders did not want to hear such things. To get rid of "trouble makers", the government arrested and without due process found him guilty with the punishment of exile to Sado Island.

Instead of being exiled, one of the powerful regents, Yoritsuna decided to execute Nichiren instead. So, treated like a common criminal, Nichiren was paraded through Kamakura on horseback. This route took him past the shrine dedicated to the god Hachiman. Hachiman is the Buddhist patron of Japan. He asked if could pray in front of the shrine and the guards allowed this wondering what would be said.

Nichiren admonished the god Hachiman. "Why are you not protecting the keeper of the Lotus Sutra? Did not all the gods vow to Buddha Sakyamuni to protect the followers of the Lotus Sutra? If you do not want to be called a liar, then you better start protecting us followers!" Then he got back on the horse and continued towards the execution grounds.

As the procession continued through town, many devoted lay followers came to Nichiren's side, trying to do what they could to appease Yoritsuna to stay the execution. Others were in tears, but Nichiren calmed them by saying that there was no greater joy than to give his life to the One True Dharma. By now they reached the execution grounds on the beach. The time was close to midnight. The executioner was preparing and the government officials were ready.

Nichiren sat down, placed his hands together and began chanting the Odaimoku as he tilted his head forward, exposing the back of his neck for the executioner. Now, what happens next is legendary, a bolt of light, as bright as the moon shot over the execution grounds, illuminating the entire area. Many people were frightened and ran away, The executioner was shocked and dropped his sword, which shattered into pieces. Even Yoritsuna ran away. This light could have been a meteorite or some other natural phenomena, but as I always say, there is no such thing as coincidence. The god Hachiman came to the rescue. Nichiren was not executed. Instead, the government decided on the original punishment of exile to Sado. Here, Nichiren wrote Kaimokusho and Kanjinhonzonsho, two of Nichiren's most famous writings about faith and practice as well as the creation of the Gohonzon.

All of this could not have happened if the incident at Tatsunokuchi did not occur. Nichiren's conviction grew even stronger to the point that he renounced his life. He no longer was trying to change Buddhism in Japan, but living according to the Lotus Sutra as the embodiment of Bodhisattva Jogyo, who vowed to the Buddha that he would return during the Age of Declining Law and expound the Lotus Sutra.

Just as Nichiren was saved by the gods, we too are protected as we are the followers and believers in the Lotus Sutra. By chanting the Odaimoku, miraculous things can happen. We cannot chant just to chant or wish a certain outcome by chanting. It is when we are calm and with true faith that our prayers will be answered, most of the time unexpectedly. I have witnessed and heard of many of these miracles, both large and small. I hope you too can experience a miracle through chanting of the Odaimoku. This will only strengthen your faith to the wonders of the True Dharma.

If you get a chance to go to Japan on a pilgrimage, I would recommend visiting Kamakura to see all the sights where Nichiren preached, his prison (which is a cave, more likely a small hole in the rocks) and the execution grounds. I went as a kid and vaguely remember the sites, but I do remember the small island, forgot the name but it is dedicated to a dragon. So maybe the bolt of light could be fire from the dragon's mouth? Hmm, things to ponder. Just remember, Tatsunokuchi incident shows the power and the truth that is contained within the Lotus Sutra. As you study, you too will begin to appreciate the message and have great joy, knowing that you are protected and deities are watching over you.