

Rissho Ankoku Ron

Rissho Ankoku Ron is considered to be one of the most important writings from Nichiren Daishonin. This letter sent to the Kamakura government detailing the reasons and answers to all the calamities, disasters and pestilence afflicting Japan, shaped Nichiren to become a fervent proselytizer of the Lotus Sutra.

After reading this letter a few times, the context is somewhat difficult to understand due to the period in which it was written. Many of the references Nichiren Daishonin uses refer back to an ancient period in China and without knowing who or what, the parables are not conveyed as clearly. This is true in many of the other writings of Nichiren Daishonin, he uses historical examples to help explain his message. It is almost worth taking a class in classical Chinese history to be able to truly grasp what Nichiren Daishonin is saying. That being said, the overall concept can still be understood.

The writing style for Rissho Ankoku Ron is termed, *dialogue*, where two people are speaking, in this case a traveler and a master. The Traveler states that Japan is in turmoil, famine, earthquakes and in much suffering. All the various Buddhist denominations try as they may, practice their particular rituals to sway the *gods* to alleviate all the ills, but to no avail. The government has stepped in to help, but their efforts are fruitless as well. Why is this? Why aren't the *gods* listening?

The Master's answer: the *gods* abandoned Japan long ago and the demons filled the void causing all the calamities. Why did the *gods* leave? The people of Japan are not practicing the True Dharma or more specifically the correct teachings of the Buddha. The master cites examples from various sutras supporting the fact that:

If the king of a country wishes to abandon this sutra and does not wish to hear it, to make offerings to it, to respect or praise it, and if he does not respect or make offerings to the four kinds of devotees who keep this sutra when he sees them and because of this, if we and our attendants and the other innumerable gods cannot hear the profound and wonderful Law expounded in this sutra, drink nectar or obtain the True Dharma, and consequently if we lose our light and power, the living beings in the evil regions will increase, and those in heaven and in the world of men will decrease. In other words, the king and people of the country will fall into the river of birth and death, and go away from the way to Nirvana. World-Honored One! If we see all this, we four Heavenly-Kings and our attendants including yaksas (a supernatural being – a protector of humans) will leave that country, and give up the intention to protect that country and the king. – *Golden Splendor Sutra*

This is just one example used to show that by straying from the True Dharma, has an effect of deserting all the Buddhas and destroying the Three Treasures. Thus, the land of Japan was led towards calamities. Many Japanese at that time were followers of Amida Buddha. Their practice was to put their faith in only Amida Buddha so that in their next life, they will enter the Pure Land in the West. Many of the other sects also preached that the quicker path to end the cycle of birth and death was to pay homage to Amida Buddha. Seems simple enough. The path shown by Shakyamuni is very difficult. There are over 637 Mahayana sutras. By reciting these sutras, one can possibly attain Nirvana in a future life. No lay person could read them all. Why wait when the Pure Land is in the next life? Thus, faith in Shakyamuni Buddha, our original teacher, was forgotten. But this act of abandonment of the Mahayana sutras is slanderous according to the Lotus Sutra chapter 3: “those who do not believe this sutra but slanders it ... will fall into the Avici Hell (the hell of Incessant Suffering – the lowest level) when their present life ends.”

The Traveler had a problem with the Master when the Master criticized respectable monks and the government who would have the knowledge to do what is right for Japan. These monks from the past who created the current favored doctrine,

were not to blame for all the calamities. The Master replied that in this day in age of declining law, there is no saint to lead the people towards Buddhahood. Thus through the blindness there is confusion. And through these many years of confusion, evil merits have accumulated causing the calamities. A parable can explain this:

A disheveled-hair man was conducting a ceremony in long ago China. A wise man notices this event and commented that this country would be occupied by foreign armies within 100 years because this country has already lost its manners. This prophecy did come true; ill omen appears before calamities takes place.

How to stop the calamities from expanding and bring about peace? In various sutras, the end of putting faith in wrong teachings is foreign invasion. Without a home there will be no Dharma and no one to honor the Buddha. A country can only prosper when in peace and we all can abide by the True Dharma. To stop the calamities, we must stop the slanderers. The master relates passage from various sutras that slandering the True Dharma is worse than committing the “5 great sins” (killing one’s own father, mother, arhat, injuring the Buddha and destroying the harmony of the Buddhist Order). The Master related passages from a couple of sutras explaining that Shakyamuni in a previous life killed those who spoke ill of the Great Vehicle. Though killing another person is considered a grave sin, killing a slanderer is not. The protectors of the True Dharma will not fall into Avici Hell but will eventually attain Buddhahood. Worst yet, those who slander the True Dharma, will fall into Avici Hell, without the possibility of escape. Does this mean that killing all slanders help reduce the calamities and bring forth peace? No. Though Shakyamuni did kill in a previous life, he did so to protect the True Dharma. Instead of killing slanders, we should not pay homage to them and instead pay homage to the Shakyamuni Buddha by keeping, reciting and hearing the

Lotus Sutra. This Lotus Sutra is the essence of all the teaching expounded by the Buddha over his many years. All the other sutras led up to this culmination whereby we being practioners of the Lotus Sutra will attain infinite merits, in order to become arhats, bodhisattvas and buddhas so that we in turn can expand the teachings across all the worlds. By adhering to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, we will help this country heal and move towards peace. By first praying for our country, then we will find peace for ourselves. A prosperous country, leads to prosperous environment enabling us to pay our respects to the Buddha. Without a home, uncertainty brews which leads to ignorance and false truths.

This day in age with all that is going on with Al-Qaeda and a possible attack similar to 9-11, just as in Nichiren Daishonin's period, foreign invasion became a reality. Instead of letting another 9-11 or worse occur, we must all do our part in trying to bring forth our country towards peace. How do we do this? We must instead help those who are ignorant see the error of their ways. To those who do not know anything about the Lotus Sutra, how can we give the message, "Keep, recite and hear the Lotus Sutra"? By letting them know about the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra which is bringing forth harmony through respecting others. This is the practice of the Never Despising Bodhisattva. Let me read you this passage from ch. 20 of the Lotus Sutra.