

Having Faith

Today we are celebrating the birthday of the founder of our sect, Nichiren Daishonin. He was born on February 16, 1222 in a small village called Kominato in present day Chiba province. Chiba province is east of Tokyo and butts up against the Pacific Ocean. Last week we celebrated two birthdays and again we are celebrating another. It seems like February is a very popular month. Setsubun was last week commemorating the end of the previous year and the start of the new year by bean throwing. Chinese New Years is today, thus I was busy last week in preparation for all the guest coming to the hotel. This will last until next week. February also marks the time passing of Sakyamuni Buddha. He entered into final Nirvana on February 15th. Is it coincidence that after Sakyamuni passes away a few thousand years later, the next day the expounder of the True Dharma was born? Maybe it is a stretch, but the world needed to hear the True Dharma again, which is the Lotus Sutra.

A few hundred years before Nichiren Daishonin's birth, Shotoku Taishi wrote a commentary on the Lotus Sutra and incorporated the teachings into political principles and tried to govern the country through Buddhism. Many people did read and studied the Lotus Sutra for it was popular in China as well as in Japan. But as the years passed, other Buddhist sutras entered Japan and were propagated more due to the simplicity in its teachings. The reason, the Lotus Sutra was too difficult for the commoner to understand, thus these other teachings gained a greater foothold. By the time Nichiren was born, the Lotus Sutra was not read as prevalently as before. The Tendai sect did base its doctrine on the Lotus Sutra but did not capture its true essence. It was not until Nichiren, through many years of studying all the sutras that he came to realize the Lotus Sutra was the one

and only True Dharma. It is in chapter 16 where the historical Buddha reveals himself as the Eternal Buddha, thus all the other Buddhas in the past, the present and future are an embodiment of himself. These other Buddhas have different names, but in actuality they are all Sakyamuni Buddha.

Other secrets appeared to Nichiren as he dissected the Lotus Sutra. The Shakumon and Honmon section or the Provisional (historical Buddha teaching, considered the first 14 chapters) and the Essential (Eternal Buddha teaching, considered the last 14 chapters), the laws of cause and effect, which brings about dependant origination, three thousand worlds containing in one thought (ichinen sanzen in Japanese) and the three great secret dharmas, Honmon no Honzon (the focus of devotion), Honmon no Kaidan (the precept platform) and Honmon no Daimoku (the great title). All of these are important doctrines of the Nichiren Shu. To explain all of these areas will take time. These are very difficult to explain and sometimes I even confuse myself. They are all advanced philosophical ideas that required great concentration.

Nichiren though, did make it easy for us to be able to capture his doctrine and comprehend the Lotus Sutra through the seven characters, Namu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo. By chanting the Odaimoku, we are able to capture all the merits, all the teachings and all the secret doctrines incorporated in all 28 chapters within these seven characters. Thus the Odaimoku has the power to heal, to inspire and to cut through the fog of ignorance. We can gain all of these merits through our faith in the Lotus Sutra. We may not be able to vocally explain everything, but we can show the power of the Odaimoku through our actions and our thoughts.

Faith is a tricky word. Is it blind? I think not, more myopic. If we were blind then we will just be told where to go and follow others. If we are myopic, I know something is in front of me but it is not clear. My curiosity is peaked, what is it? I want to know what that is in front of me. That is having faith in Nichiren Shu. Though we might not fully understand the meanings of the various teachings and writings of Nichiren, we are still gaining the benefits of such teachings through the chanting of the Odaimoku. If we chant sincerely, with all of our hearts, minds and bodies through shodaigyo, we will notice a change in ourselves. We become calmer, an inspiration may come upon us, an answer to a question may appear before us and so forth. Mysterious things, positive things may start happening. This is all due to the power of the Odaimoku thus the power of the Lotus Sutra, thus the power of the Eternal Buddha.

Does this mean that all we have to do is just chant the Odaimoku? Well yes, at first. To be able to grasp the teaching of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren, we have to start from what is easiest, which is the Odaimoku. The Odaimoku is an expedient, a way to get introduced to the complexity of the True Dharma. Many people have never heard the True Dharma before in their previous lives, thus the concept is extremely foreign. The Odaimoku helps kick start the Buddhaseed in everyone. Thus after going to temple and listen to the minister's sermon and attending various study classes, we will start to gain the knowledge of and about the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren. This may take years which is fine. Does a redwood tree become a giant over night? No, it takes many thousand of years. Buddhism is about your spiritual growth which may take many lives depending on your karma.

On the flip side it is easy to quit, look for something else which is easier to grasp, more instantaneous in gratification. Other religions and dogma have what I call “short cuts” to salvation. But are we any smarter? Are we gaining any insight? No we are not. The Winter Olympics started on Friday with the opening ceremony. These athletes spent many years, sacrificing their fun time to devote themselves in fine tuning their specialty. I cannot enter an event and be given the gold, just as my salvation is not at hand just by doing this or that. Only through hard work and lots of faith in the Odaimoku and the Lotus Sutra will we all be able to attain the gold medal and stand upon the podium and be recognized. This gold medal is the final attainment of Buddhahood.

So as we sit here today, contemplating how we can get our own gold medal, have faith in the Odaimoku. Know that though it may seem difficult to understand right now, be calm, do not stress. By chanting insight will appear, our myopia will slowly disappear and our vision becomes clearer.