

Nikko Shonin and Nanjo Tokimitsu

2011 Summer Study Tozan Group Lecture August 28, 2011

In 2009, the High Priest gave us the objective to carry out shakubuku toward increasing the membership of all countries by 50 percent by the year 2015, when we will celebrate the auspicious occasion of the 770th anniversary of the birth of Second High Priest Nikko Shonin. Hokkeko members all over the world are striving toward the achievement of this objective.

Today, I would like to share my sermon titled “Nikko Shonin and Nanjo Tokimitsu,” in relation to the objective of the 770th anniversary of the birth of Nikko Shonin and the significance of repaying our debts of gratitude.

As you may know, the residence of Nanjo Tokimitsu was established in 1324, almost 680 years ago. Later, it became Myorenji Temple, named in honor of the Buddhist name of his wife, Myoren. The graves of both parents of Nanjo Tokimitsu, Nanjo Hyo’e Shichiro and his wife, Myoho-ama, still remain. They are located just more than a half mile south of Myorenji Temple. Every year on May 1, the anniversary of Nanjo Tokimitsu’s passing; all the priests of Myorenji Temple and believers in the neighborhood visit his grave and pay their respects.

On March 8, 1265, the father of Tokimitsu, Hyo’e Shichiro, passed away and was buried in the Nanjo family cemetery. That same year, Nichiren Daishonin personally traveled here to the Ueno area, all the way from Kamakura, to visit Hyo’e Shichiro’s grave.

Nichiren Daishonin stated the following in the Gosho, “In Celebration of Spring”:

I was deeply grieved to hear of the death of Hyo’e Shichiro who was a man in his prime. I had been thinking about him with fond memories. Thus, I went all the way to Suruga Province to visit his grave.

(Summary)

Nichiren Daishonin was in the midst of continuous persecutions, arising one after another. Two years before Hyo’e Shichiro passed away, he was pardoned from exile in Izu. But the following year, in November 1264, he and his party were attacked at Komatsubara. His disciple Kyoninbo and a believer named Kudo Yoshitaka were killed, and the Daishonin was injured. Although he was in a precarious situation, he still went to visit Shichiro’s grave in Suruga Province.

This occasion of the Daishonin’s visit was the first opportunity for Nanjo Tokimitsu to meet him. Later, Tokimitsu would go on to become a believer who

protected Nichiren Daishonin, Nikko Shonin, and their disciples and believers at the risk of his life. However, at the time he first met the Daishonin, Tokimitsu was only a seven-year old boy.

On this occasion, a bond formed between Nikko Shonin and Nanjo Tokimitsu. This profound relationship later became the origin for the establishment of Taisekiji Temple. Nichiren Daishonin, as the True Buddha, could have foreseen this and made the trip to Suruga Province. On the other hand, Nanjo Tokimitsu, who was in deep sorrow over losing his father, was encouraged profoundly by the compassionate figure of Nichiren Daishonin when he visited the Nanjo family residence.

A seven-year old boy is like a student who is in the second grade of elementary school today. This encounter with Nichiren Daishonin was the beginning of Nanjo Tokimitsu upholding his faith and practice. He did not begrudge his life to protect Nichiren Daishonin. This is described as the manifestation of a karmic relationship (*shukuen kunpotsu*).

Eventually, nine years later -- although there was no news of Nichiren Daishonin for quite awhile -- the Daishonin was pardoned from exile in Sado and moved to Minobu. Within days, the master-disciple relationship between the two grew stronger.

Nichiren Daishonin settled in Minobu in May 1274. In June, when his residence was built, his disciples and believers started to visit him.

Soon, the Daishonin met Tokimitsu for the first time in almost 10 years since he visited Shichiro's grave in 1265. In July 1274, the Daishonin related his impression of Tokimitsu in the Goshō, "Reply to the Widow of Lord Ueno":

Not only his appearance, but also his attitude toward faith resembles his father's. It seems that Hyō'e Shichiro himself has renewed his youth and left his son as a bequest.

("Reply to the Widow of Lord Ueno," [Summary])

In 1274, Tokimitsu was 16 years old. He had just assumed responsibility for his family, due to the death of his brother, Shichiro Taro.

At that time, Nikko Shonin was 29 years old, strong, and energetic. He was focusing on propagation efforts in Suruga province and paid frequent visits from Minobu to Fuji to expand the range of propagation. Naturally, he also forged closer ties with the Nanjo family.

This can be seen from the Daishonin's statement in the Goshō, "In Celebration of Spring," written in January 1275:

I have sent my disciple to fulfill my intention to visit you during the first month, and recite the scroll of the *Jigage* section at gravesite.

Nikko Shonin visited the grave of Hyō'e Shichiro on behalf of Nichiren Daishonin.

For nine years, from the time Nichiren Daishonin moved to Mt. Minobu in July 1274, to his demise in 1282, Nanjo Tokimitsu dedicated himself to protect the Daishonin. Throughout those years, the Daishonin received various Gokuyo offerings from the Nanjo family every year during the harvest season.

As a point of reference, it takes a full day to walk from Myorenji Temple to the site of the Daishonin's residence in Minobu.

Through the Goshō passages, we can see that the Nanjo family offered Gokuyo such as *gamoku* (money), sake, wheat, cloth, polished rice, salt, and other daily necessities to Nichiren Daishonin.

But these are only the offerings that were mentioned in letters of gratitude from the Daishonin when they were brought by a messenger. If we consider the fact that Tokimitsu went to the Daishonin's residence many times himself to offer Gokuyo, we can see that even more Gokuyo had been given by Tokimitsu.

Each time Nanjo Tokimitsu delivered these items of offering to the Daishonin in Minobu, he received precious doctrinal instruction directly from the Daishonin or through Nikko Shonin. As a result, Tokimitsu was able to deepen his faith increasingly.

The great achievement of Nanjo Tokimitsu was not only the protection of the Daishonin. During the Atsuhara Persecution, he harbored believers from Atsuhara together with Nikko Shonin in his residence without any hesitation, even though it was dangerous for him to do so. And what is more remarkable, after the Daishonin's passing, Tokimitsu welcomed Nikko Shonin to the Fuji-Ueno District and exerted his utmost efforts toward the establishment of Taisekiji.

Today's subject, "Nikko Shonin and Nanjo Tokimitsu" is about the relationship between the master of Buddhist practice and his disciple who protected him. Through the Atsuhara Persecution, their master-disciple relationship further strengthened.

And due to their strong relationship, Nanjo Tokimitsu invited Nikko Shonin to the Fuji-Ueno district, which led to the establishment of Head Temple Taisekiji.

When we face southeast from the Somon gate, we can slightly see Suruga Bay. However, the plain field just before Suruga Bay is said to be the former Atsuhara district. It is a vast, fertile land of abundance, and its crop harvest is much greater than that of the Ueno district. Nikko Shonin had a deep relationship with the Atsuhara district because he studied Buddhism at Shijuku-in Temple, which is located there. When the Daishonin moved to Minobu, Nikko Shonin focused on the propagation of true Buddhism in the Atsuhara district.

Before long, the true teaching spread to Ryusenji Temple. Shimotsuke-bo, Echigo-bo, and Sho'u-bo became disciples of Nikko Shonin. Peasants living in the area also converted to the true Law.

Gyochi, the chief priest of Ryusenji Temple, bore a grudge, as propagation progressed, and he persecuted the priests and lay believers of the Daishonin's Buddhism. Eventually, 20 peasants were arrested. The three leaders of the Atsuhara

believers, Jinshiro, Yagoro, and Yarokuro were beheaded. The remaining 17 peasants were banished.

Facing this crucial moment, Nikko Shonin exerted vigorous efforts to resolve the situation under the direction of Nichiren Daishonin. The Daishonin stated the following in “On Persecutions Befalling the Buddha” (“*Shōnin gonanji*”):

Do encourage the ones from Atsuhara who are not familiar with Buddhism. Tell them to be prepared for the worst, and not to expect good times. Rather, they should take the bad times for granted.

(Summary)

He instructed Nikko Shonin to encourage the persecuted peasants.

Furthermore, when the Daishonin was informed that three believers were beheaded, he wrote the following in “Reply to the Sages” (“*Shoninto gohenji*”):

When they [the Hokkeko believers in Atsuhara] were punished [by Hei no Saemon], they reportedly chanted Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. Truly, this was no insignificant matter...If the character *myo* is not a lie, then rewards and punishments will clearly appear before long. Hokibo [Nikko Shonin] and the others must gain a profound understanding of this and mark my words. They must relay it to the recorder of the court.

(*Gosho*, p. 1405)

The Daishonin instructed Nikko Shonin to bring the case before the government.

Following the instructions of Nichiren Daishonin, Nanjo Tokimitsu worked with Nikko Shonin to support the Hokkeko members in Atsuhara, and he protected the peasants during the persecution.

In “Reply to Lord Ueno,” the Daishonin stated that the reason why Tokimitsu was so willing to save the Hokkeko members in Atsuhara is because he was ready to give his life to protect the Lotus Sutra. On November 6, 1279, 20 days after the tragic death of the three Atsuhara believers, the Daishonin bestowed the title of Ueno Kenjin (Ueno the Wise) upon the 21 year-old Tokimitsu. He wrote the *Gosho*, “Reply to Lord Ueno,” which ends as follows:

I write this reply in gratitude for the valiant conduct you displayed at the time of the Atsuhara Persecution.

(Summary)

And, in the *Gosho*, “The Ruler’s Fate” (“Reply to Lord Ueno”), written on July 2, 1280, Nichiren Daishonin stated:

I am grateful to you for providing housing for the Shinto priests and other followers up to now....If it becomes too difficult for you to hide them at your

estate, please tell them to come to my residence for a while. It is unlikely that their wives and children will be subjected to interrogation, even if they continue to stay there. You probably should keep them with you until this matter subsides....The contents of this letter should be kept confidential and communicated only to those concerned.

(Summary)

This Gosho was written about eight months after the Atsuhara persecution, and proves that during the persecution, Nanjo Tokimitsu provided shelter at his own residence for the Shinto priests and Hokkeko believers. Thus, they were kept out of danger.

Nichiren Daishonin instructed Tokimitsu to send the Shinto priests to his residence if it became too dangerous for the Nanjo family to continue hiding them.

As I mentioned earlier, the distance between Atsuhara and Ueno districts can be covered on foot within a few hours.

Needless to say, we can assume that the chief priest Gyochi and officials of the government knew that Nanjo Tokimitsu was hiding the Shinto priests who had converted to the true Law.

The Daishonin was worried about Tokimitsu's circumstances and suggested that he send the priests to his residence in Minobu. But Tokimitsu declined to do so and continued to harbor them, despite the danger. In fact, in a later Gosho titled "The Wealthy Man Sudatta" ("Reply to Lord Ueno"), written in December 1280, the Daishonin mentions the fact that the feudal government actually had imposed extra duties on the Nanjo family and had burdened Tokimitsu heavily.

Even in these dire circumstances, however, Tokimitsu still visited the Daishonin, living deep in the snowy mountains, in order to make offerings. Through this Gosho, we can see Nanjo Tokimitsu's determination to "not begrudge his life for the sake of the Lotus Sutra" and his strong will to protect the Daishonin.

The Atsuhara Persecution was the key factor leading the Daishonin to inscribe the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching.

Through this persecution, Nichiren Daishonin came to realize that there were believers who did not begrudge their lives to protect the Law. This was one of the reasons why the Daishonin felt that the time had arrived.

Approximately ten years later in 1289, when Nikko Shonin departed Mt. Minobu, Nanjo Tokimitsu welcomed him to Ueno district. Thus, Nikko Shonin could actualize the will of Nichiren Daishonin to "establish the [True] High Sanctuary of Honmonji Temple at Mount Fuji." In the following year, 1290, Taisekiji Temple, where the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching is enshrined, was established.

The deep bond between Nikko Shonin and Nanjo Tokimitsu characterized the starting point of the development and prosperity of Nichiren Shoshu.

From then until now, 721 years have passed. Since the passing of Nichiren Daishonin, the Heritage of the Law has been passed down purely from Nikko

Shonin to the successive High Priests, down to the present High Priest Nichinyo Shonin. It is our important duty as priests and lay believers to protect and propagate the true Law in order to pass down the heritage of faith from generation to generation.

Thus, first and foremost, we must create a huge and firm foundation for Nichiren Shoshu. For this to be realized, we must conduct shakubuku activities and cultivate Hokkeko members. This is the only way to further the progress of Nichiren Shoshu.

If we are satisfied with our present situation and take no action, Nichiren Shoshu will decline before long.

The priesthood and laity of Nichiren Shoshu must unite with the spirit of many in body, one in mind and put forth our utmost efforts in order to realize the objectives given to us by our High Priest. We must increase the membership of all Hokkeko chapters by 50 percent by the year 2015, when we will be celebrating the auspicious occasion of the 770th anniversary of the birth of Nikko Shonin, and we must achieve a membership of 800,000 Hokkeko believers by the year 2021, when we will be celebrating the 800th anniversary of the advent of Nichiren Daishonin.

Let us move forward toward kosen-rufu and carry out shakubuku with confidence.

I would like to conclude my lecture with my prayers for your good health, continued success, and the progress of each Hokkeko chapter.