

Question: What is the background of Second High Priest Nikko Shonin?

February 7, marks the memorial of the Second High Priest Nikko Shonin. It is the day of his passing. At the Head Temple Taisekiji and all branch temples around the world, the Koshi-e Ceremony is conducted on this day. For this ceremony, there is a tradition that has been passed down to offer dropworts, also known as Japanese parsley, to the Gohonzon, because High Priest Nikko Shonin enjoyed them. For this reason, the Koshi-e Ceremony also has been called the “Dropwort Oko.” High Priest Nikko Shonin truly lived up to serving his master through protecting the Daishonin’s teachings with his life, and correctly transmitting them. When we attend the Koshi-e Ceremony, let all of us attend with our families and chant resolute Daimoku with deep gratitude.

Eternally Serving one’s Master

High Priest Nikko Shonin was born on March 8, 1246 (fourth year of Kangen), at Kajikazawa Province, present day Yamanashi Prefecture in Japan. As a young adolescent, he entered Shijuku-in Temple (Fujigawa City, Shizuoka Prefecture) and immersed himself in studying various subjects. When he was 13 years of age, Nichiren Daishonin visited Jissoji Temple, which was close to Shijuku-in Temple, in order to research and prepare for his writing of the *Rissho ankoku-ron*. It was during this time that Nikko Shonin first met Nichiren Daishonin and immediately was allowed to become the Daishonin’s disciple. From that point on, he developed a master disciple relationship with the Daishonin, and he even followed the Daishonin into exile when his master was banished to Izu Peninsula and Sado Island.

No matter how difficult the challenges became, Nikko Shonin never left the Daishonin’s side. As a result, he was able to spend each day listening to the Daishonin’s important teachings. Thus, he was able to not only understand the Buddhist teachings intellectually, but also was able to experience the profundity of the content physically. This appearance between master and disciple is referred to as “*jo zui kyu ji*.” Because of this relationship, among all of the Daishonin’s disciples, only Nikko Shonin was able to recognize that the Daishonin was the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. Due to his deep and correct understanding of what the Daishonin taught, Nikko Shonin was trained to become the legitimate successor to

the Daishonin's teachings.

Propagating the Teachings through Shakubuku

After the Daishonin returned from Sado Island, he settled in the Minobu area of Kai Province. He was welcomed there by the steward of the region, Hakiri Sanenaga, who had been shakubukued by Nikko Shonin. While serving and training under his master, Nikko Shonin frequently would go toward the Fuji area and exert himself in shakubuku efforts. He summoned up his courage to propagate the Daishonin's teachings and successfully shakubukued many laymen and priests from Shijuku-in Temple, Jissoji Temple, and Ryusenji Temple. There were, however, individuals who felt threatened by these propagation efforts. Some of these converts, who were farmers, were arrested and warned that their heads would be severed if they immediately did not stop practicing the Daishonin's teachings. Despite such threats, however, the Daishonin's followers were not swayed in the least and continued to practice and chant Daimoku. As a result, three brothers who were the central figures in Atsuhara Village, Jinshiro, Yagoro, and Yarokuro were beheaded for no crime committed. Despite tremendous persecution, the farmers did not give up their faith and continued to uphold the Daishonin's teachings. This event is known as the Atsuhara Persecution.

In the present day, even if you are told to give up your faith, [in most countries] you will not be killed. Fortunately, we have been taught the importance of upholding our practice through the guidance of Nikko Shonin, hence, we must develop a resolute practice where we do not begrudge our lives. Additionally, we must keep in mind what the Atsuhara martyrs had to face.

Leaving Minobu

On Oct. 13, 1282 (fifth year of Koan), the Daishonin peacefully passed away in present day Ikegami, Ota-ku, Tokyo. Before he passed away, he entrusted all of his teachings to Nikko Shonin, who was designated as the legitimate successor through the transmission of the Heritage of the Law. The Daishonin also appointed him as the Chief Priest of Kuonji Temple at Minobu. At the time of his passing, the Daishonin had many disciples, but most of them gradually started to forget about the teachings. They did not try to follow the legitimate successor, Nikko Shonin, and did not even bother to pay their respects during the first and third year

memorials of the Daishonin. The deteriorating circumstances were indeed truly sad and only worsened. In the spring of 1285, (eighth year of Koan), a former disciple of the Daishonin named Mambu Niko returned to Minobu. Nikko Shonin was delighted to see Niko and eagerly expected him to lend his efforts toward kosen-rufu. Nikko Shonin appointed him as chief instructor of the priests, second to him in position. However, Mambu Niko betrayed Nikko Shonin. As time passed, he started refusing to listen to Nikko Shonin and under Niko's negative influence, the steward of the region, Hakiri Sanenaga, started to slander the Daishonin's Buddhism directly.

Nikko Shonin was deeply saddened, by both believers' change of heart. He repeatedly warned them that their acts were deliberately slanderous to the Daishonin's teachings, but to no avail. Feeling that he could no longer protect the Daishonin's teachings at Mt. Minobu, he made the decision to leave in order to protect and correctly transmit his master's teachings. In the spring of 1289 (second year of Shoo), Nikko Shonin departed with deep sadness, taking the Dai-Gohonzon, the Daishonin's ashes, and other treasures with him. As he grieved remembering the memorable times spent at Minobu, he headed toward Fuji District, where Nanjo Tokimitsu had an estate.

The Founding of Taisekiji

In the spring of 1289, Nikko Shonin, after departing Minobu, accepted the invitation of Lord Nanjo Tokimitsu, a strong and loyal believer. He stayed at the temple residence called the Jibutsudo [present-day Shimo-no-bo] for awhile. Nanjo Tokimitsu was the steward of the Fuji District. He donated Oishigahara, a large parcel of land, as Gokuyo to Nikko Shonin. Thus, on October 12 1290, Nikko Shonin built a small temple, which was the beginning of Taisekiji. For some time, Taisekiji was called "Oishi" Temple after Oishigahara, which means "field of large boulders," but in subsequent years, it became known as Taisekiji. Incidentally, the first temple built at Taisekiji was the Mutsubo. At around the same time, Nichimoku Shonin built the Renzobo, and once he started residing there, his disciples consecutively started building temples along the Tatchu path. In this manner, they propagated the Law while protecting the Dai-Gohonzon and Nikko Shonin. Over time, all of the temples and lodgings were constructed, giving rise to the magnificent temple grounds of present-day Taisekiji.

Nikko Shonin had to leave Mt. Minobu in order to preserve and protect the Daishonin's teachings correctly. This was of critical importance. His departure was a direct result of the betrayal by Niko and Hakiri Sanenaga, who started to act in blatant contradiction to the Daishonin's Buddhism. However, the true reason was due to the following directive [given by Nichiren Daishonin to Nikko Shonin in the "Document for Entrusting the Law that Nichiren Propagated throughout His life"]:

When the sovereign accepts this Law, erect the High Sanctuary of the Temple of the Essential Teaching (Honmonji) at the foot of Mt. Fuji. Just wait for the time to come. This is the Actual Precept of the Law. Above all, my disciples and followers are to obey this decree.

(*Gosho*, p. 1675 [Summary])

Nikko Shonin carried out the directive given to him by the Daishonin. When one looks at Mt. Fuji from the Taisekiji grounds, one is able to experience peace and tranquility. This is of course due to the proximity of the Dai-Gohonzon, but also due to the ability to feel the all-encompassing great compassion of Nikko Shonin, who protected the Daishonin's Buddhism and correctly propagated the true teachings.

Entrustment to a Single Person

The day after the establishment of Taisekiji, Nikko Shonin selected Nichimoku Shonin to be his sole successor and entrusted him with all of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. This is called the Transmission of the Heritage of the Law (*kechimyaku sojo*). In this manner, only one disciple is selected to be the sole successor by the High Priest, and this is referred to as the "entrustment to a single person." The teachings of Nichiren Shoshu have been passed down correctly from Nikko Shonin on down to the present Sixty-eighth High Priest Nichinyo Shonin through the Transmission of the Heritage of the Law as the entrustment to a sole successor. We must revere the successive High Priests as the Master of the Seat of the Law and practice correctly. This is the most important point within our practice, so please never forget this.

Training his Disciples

In February of 1298, Nikko Shonin entrusted Nichimoku Shonin with Taisekiji. He then established the Omosu Seminary, where he relocated, a little more than a mile away from the Head Temple. At the seminary, he devoted himself to teaching Buddhist doctrine and training his disciples. Nikko Shonin resided at the Omosu Seminary for 35 years until his death. He was devoted to training his disciples, who would be responsible for kosen-rufu. No matter how correct and great the Daishonin's teachings are, in order for them to be propagated, it requires human effort. Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin trained numerous disciples and developed many leaders who would later serve the Law.

Working toward a New Directive

On January 13, 1333, Nikko Shonin wrote the "Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko" ("*Nikko Yuikai Okimon*") to his numerous disciples and believers as an admonishment to priests and lay believers to maintain the purity of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings at all times. He cautioned his disciples that they must not fail to uphold even one article, and with this strict instruction, he passed away on February 7 of the same year. One of the articles in the "Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko" states:

Until kosen-rufu is achieved, propagate the Law to the full extent of your ability without begrudging your life.

(*Gosho*, p. 1884)

It has been more than 750 years since the Daishonin's passing, and the only Buddhist school that correctly has upheld and protected the true teachings is Nichiren Shoshu. This is due to Nikko Shonin, who transmitted all of the Daishonin's teachings to us in the present day. Therefore, we always must put the teachings of Nikko Shonin into practice and work toward kosen-rufu. This is exactly what the Daishonin instructed us to do in carrying out correct practice.

The year 2015 will mark the 770th Anniversary of the birth of Nikko Shonin. We have received the directive from Sixty-eighth High Priest Nichinyo Shonin to increase the Hokkeko membership 50 percent by 2015. In order for us to repay our debt of gratitude to Nikko Shonin, let us take a huge step and make the most of our abilities by utilizing them toward shakubuku efforts.

