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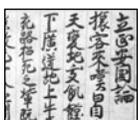
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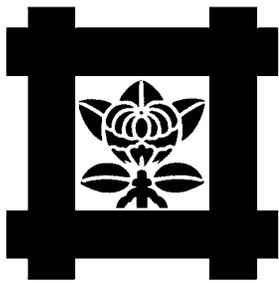
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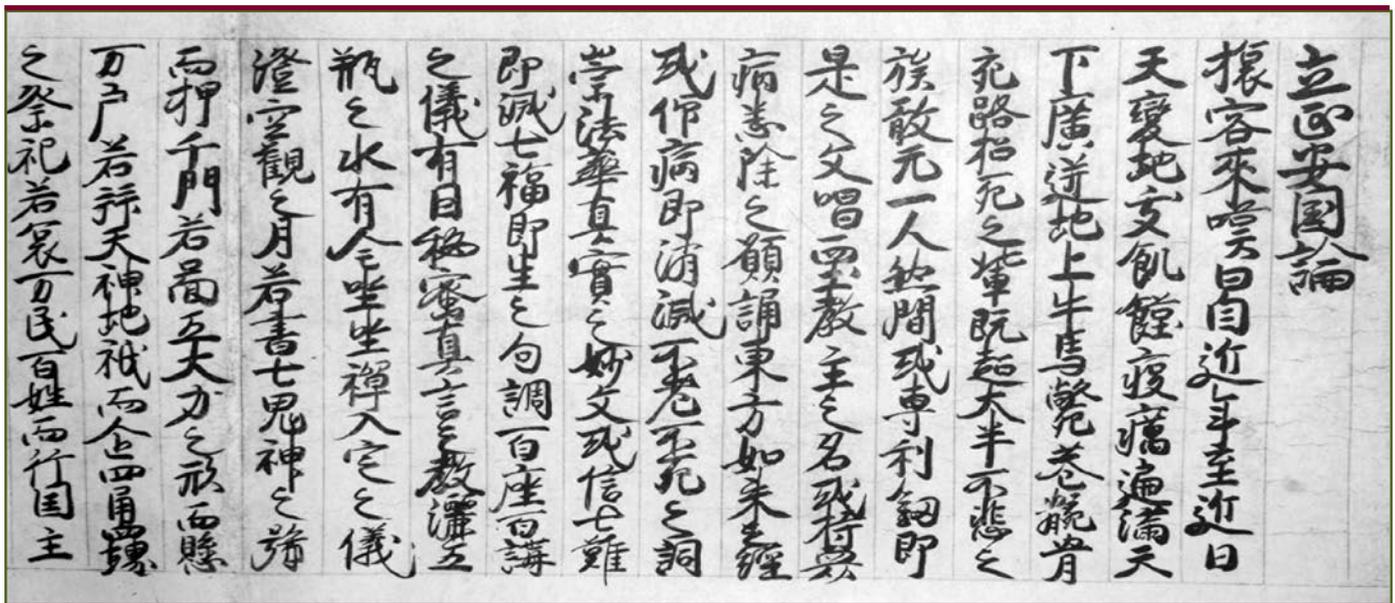
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Rissho Ankoku Ron Nichiren Shōnin's Major Works I



Rissho Ankoku Ron, National Treasure of Japan, Nakayama Hokekyoji, Chiba

Rev. Chishin Hirai

General Manager

Nichiren Buddhist International Center

The “*Rissho Ankoku Ron*” represents one of Nichiren Shōnin’s five major works. He wrote and presented it to the Kamakura Shogunate in 1260. The original manuscript of the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* is still preserved at Hokekyoji temple of Nakayama in Chiba, Japan. Let us examine what Nichiren Shōnin teaches us through this work.

■ MOTIVE

Why did Nichiren Shōnin write the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*? According to the “*Ankoku Ron Okugaki*”, a postscript to the *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, Nichiren Shōnin notes that he began writing the *Rissho Ankoku Ron* after experiencing a severe earthquake at around nine o’clock in the evening on the twenty-third day of the eighth month of the first year of the Shoka Era (1257). Many disasters, such as the big earthquake, big fire, extremely strong winds, famine, and plague, occurred in the 1250s. In his treatise, Nichiren Shōnin describes strange phe-

nomena in the sky, natural calamities on earth, famines and epidemics that in recent years had spread throughout Japan. Oxen and horses lay dead at crossroads and the streets were filled with skeletons. Many lost their lives and the survivors suffered dearly from these disasters. The majority of the population perished and all were stricken with grief. The Shogunate ordered Buddhist temples and Shinto Shrines to pray for recovery. However, there was no sign of improvement. Nichiren Shōnin was alarmed by the dire situation, and set out for the library of Jissoji temple in Iwamoto to research the causes of the calamities

立正安國論

Rissho

Ankoku

Ron

and to look for a solution. He tried to find an answer in Buddhist teachings. He read all the sutras over again and searched for an answer in terms of Buddha Dhama, reason, and the actual course of events. The culmination of this effort was the writing of the Rissho Ankoku Ron.

■ THEME

The title, ‘Rissho Ankoku Ron’, by itself, expresses its contents and purposes clearly. ‘Rissho’ means to establish the right teaching, to believe in the Lotus Sutra, the most wonderful teaching of the Buddha. ‘Ankoku’ refers to guiding Japan and all countries to pursue the path to peace by establishing a world of the Buddha. It does not aim to merely protect countries, but to make them peaceful (without fighting), and to bring spiritual tranquility. ‘Rissho Ankoku’ carries additional religious meaning. ‘Rissho Ankoku’ articulates Nichiren Shōnin’s wish to make this world the Buddha’s world with faith in the Lotus Sutra. The contents of the Rissho Ankoku Ron include ten questions and responses between a traveler and a master. The response to question 9 reads: “You should promptly discard your false faith, and take up the true and sole teaching of the Lotus Sutra at once. Then this triple world of the unenlightened will all become Buddha lands. Will Buddha lands ever decay? All the worlds in the universe will become Pure Lands. Will Pure Lands ever be

destroyed? When our country does not decay and the world is not destroyed, our bodies will be safe and our hearts tranquil. Believe these words and revere them!”

■ INFLUENCE

Ever since Nichiren Shōnin presented the Rissho Ankoku Ron to the Shogunate, He was forced to live a life of hardship. His remonstrance resulted in his being twice exiled by high officials and his being attacked by followers of other faiths. Nonetheless, he continued to spread the Lotus Sutra at the risk of jeopardizing his own life. As the Lotus Sutra claims, “They will speak ill of us, or frown at us, or drive us out of monasteries from time to time,” Nichiren Shōnin was encouraged to put the Lotus Sutra into practice with more conviction. In this sense, we may assume that the life of Nichiren Shōnin as a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra began and ended with the Rissho Ankoku Ron.

■ MEANING OF ‘RISSHO ANKOKU RON’ IN THE MODERN AGE

Conflicts abound throughout the world today. They sadden us. We know that there are many causes behind each situation and these problems are not as simple as they appear. For example, problems may occur over such things as politics, race, religion, or natural resources. We lament

that one of the many issues is religion. Religion should lead people to happiness. Why must we fight one another, at the risk of everyone’s life, because of religion? It makes us wonder about the purpose of religion. In the response to question 8 of the Rissho Ankoku Ron, Nichiren Shōnin instructs: “Stop giving offerings to the evil priests who slander the True Dharma, putting all one’s faith instead in the defenders of the True Dharma.”

We feel that this teaching may offer an answer to the problem that we have just mentioned. Nowhere in the Rissho Ankoku Ron is there a mention of hurting anyone, whether its foes are non-believers or even slanderers of the Lotus Sutra. On the contrary, the Rissho Ankoku Ron enjoins us to confront problems with calmness, providing an example, suggesting that this is the way we ought to follow, even in the modern age. We must lessen any conflicts under the name of religion and achieve a peaceful world. Buddhists, throughout history, have never sought to attack anyone under the name of the Buddha. Few religions can claim this. In this sense, Buddhism is a wonderful religion. We are urged to keep and protect its profound teachings and beautiful traditions. And, we are reminded of this whenever we read the Rissho Ankoku Ron. Merely keeping the ‘Rissho Ankoku Ron’, however, is not sufficient; it is important to activate it in our minds and bodies, to believe and practice the Lotus Sutra, the most central teaching of the Buddha, in order to enhance and create a Buddha-world.

The Lotus Sutra for Children

by Rev. Kōge Matsumoto Translated by Rev. Shōkai Kanai
 (The book was written for grandparents and parents to read to their children.
 The content is very deep but easy for all to understand.)

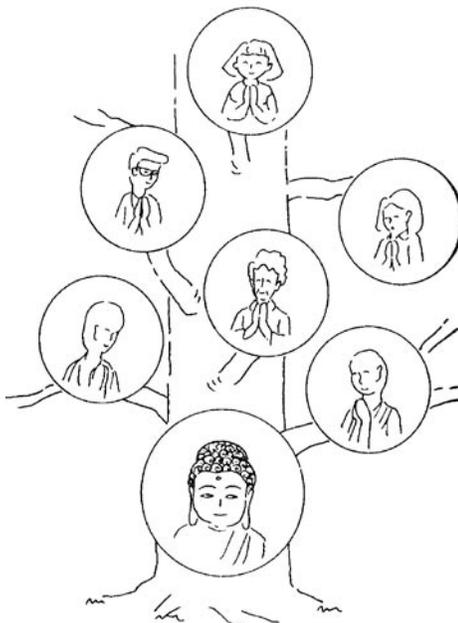
Volume 3: Expedients of the Lotus Sutra



— Chapter 4 —

ONLY BUDDHAS UNDERSTAND

In the *Sutra of Innumerable Teachings*, the Buddha Śākyamuni taught that the trunk and branches grow from the roots that spread deep and wide underground. The Buddha had not yet revealed the true teachings that are like the roots of a tree. Upon making this declaration, He closed His eyes and mouth and went into deep meditation.



After the long meditation, the Buddha finally opened His eyes. He began to talk to Sariputra about the beginning of the *Lotus Sutra*. The mood of the Buddha was quite different as compared to previous sutras.

When He taught prior sutras, those who had troubles and sufferings asked Him: “How can I solve such and such problems?” Or “How can I be redeemed from such and such debts?” His disciples asked, “Lord Buddha! How should I lead others in such and such a case?” Thus, the Buddha answered their questions and requests from His disciples and followers. However this time was different! The Buddha emerged quietly from his meditation and began to talk to Sariputra, “The Number One Wisdom Disciple,” before anybody asked a question or requested a solution. He said, “The One and Only Truth in the Universe is too difficult for people to understand. It is too difficult even for the wisest people like Sariputra to understand, much less the people who read books, listen to the Dharma or do ascetic practices in the natural world to understand the truth.” So, He did not talk any further about the real teaching in His mind. He said that only the people who have compassionate minds like the Buddhas can understand the teaching and thus did not intend to talk.



Looking at the Buddha not intending to talk, the great multitude including the five original monks like Kaudinya, twelve hundred monks and disciples thought, “Why does the World-Honored One repeatedly say that nobody except a compassionate person like the Buddha will understand the One and Only Truth in the Universe that everyone is able to become a Buddha? We have practiced the Buddha’s teachings for many years and practiced the teachings in mountains and forests in the natural world. We thought we have reached Nirvana. We do not understand why He said, “Only a compassionate person like the Buddha understands it.” We do not understand why He does not explain how to become a compassionate person who can understand the One

and Only Truth in the Universe that everyone is able to become a Buddha. What does He want us to do? We wish to listen to the highest truth.

— Chapter 5 —

THREE REQUESTS AND THREE DENIALS



Sariputra, being worthy as the wisest disciple, understood the congregation's murmurs. He asked, "Śākyamuni, World

Honored One, you are like the sun, which is most important to us! You kept your eyes and mouth shut for a long time in the *Introduction of the Lotus Sutra*. Then red and white lotus flowers petals in varying sizes rained down from the sky. The earth shook in six different directions. You emitted a ray of light from the white curls between your eyebrows and illuminated the east.

We wondered what would happen and what you would reveal. We waited for you to speak up for a long time. However, once you spoke,

you kept saying that we would not understand at all. I have heard various teachings from you for the last forty years. I have never before heard the words that the One and Only Truth in the Universe is that everyone is able to become a Buddha and only those who have compassionate minds like the Buddha are able to understand the reality of all things. Besides that, you have repeated it is hard to understand and difficult to enter the gate to the Buddha Wisdom.

There must be a supreme meaning for you to say these words. Lord Buddha, you have praised me as the wisest among your disciples, but I still cannot understand what you have revealed. Please explain all this for the multitudes of over eighty thousand people, bodhisattvas, deities and all living beings who are gathered here. Please expound the ultimate truth."

Thereupon the Buddha said to him, "No, no, I will not. It is not yet time for expounding the truth. If I do, all the gods and men who cannot believe and doubt it will be frightened and perplexed. The arrogant will fall into a great pit of hell. What they have learned will be in vain. That is why I will not teach any more."

Thereupon Sariputra was sad and downcast to hear the Buddha's refusal to say more.

He wished to hear the teaching of the One and Only Truth more enthusiastically. So he requested again, "World-Honored One, expound the Dharma, please expound it! The hundreds of thousands of living beings in this congregation followed the past Buddhas and received their teachings in those precious past existences. There is no one to doubt your teachings. We will respect and believe it sincerely however difficult it is to understand."

Thereupon the Buddha refused again, saying "No, Sariputra, if I expound the One and Only Truth, the people in the levels of "bearer" or *Shravaka* and "private Buddha" or *Pratyekabuddha* will surely be surprised and doubt my teachings. *Shravaka* people think that they are always listening to the Buddha Dharma and practicing it diligently in their own ways.



— Chapter 6 —

THE BUDDHA DECIDES TO EXPOUND THE TRUTH

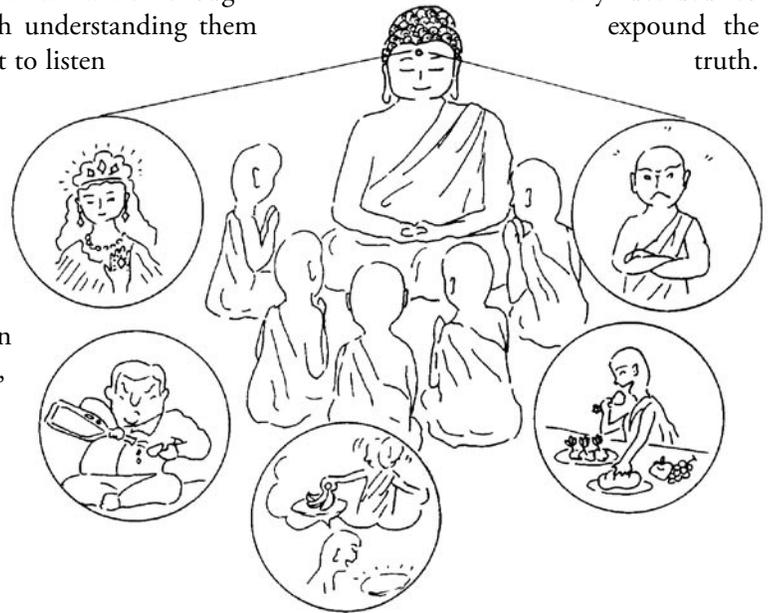
So, they often laugh at others who are not. *Pratyekabuddha* people practice Buddha Dharma by themselves in forests or woods and think highly of themselves as they have almost reached Enlightenment while others have not. If someone doubts the Buddha's teachings, they will surely fall into a great pit of hell. The arrogant people will fall into hell. That is the reason why I better not expound the truth."

Then, Sariputra implored the Buddha again, "World Honored One, we beg you to expound the supreme teachings that will lead us to attain Buddhahood. I am the one you named 'The Number One Wisdom Disciple,' and I sincerely request you to expound it. Please look at us waiting for your teaching. Putting their hands in *gashho* without blinking their eyes, they wish eagerly to hear from you. Please understand our requests and expound the One and Only Truth in the Universe! Explain the teachings for us to attain Buddhahood! We will be delighted and saved!"

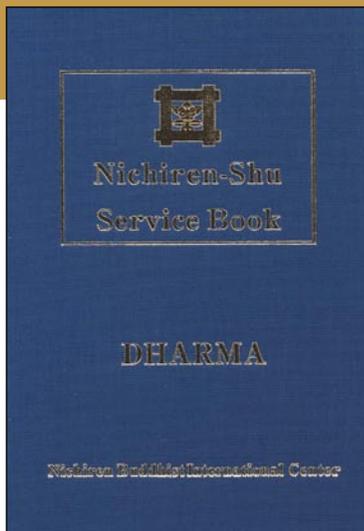
Buddha Śākyamuni finally decided to expound the One and Only Truth in the Universe after Sariputra's third request. Before he spoke up, he looked around the congregation again and read their minds. He understood that the majority of the congregation were sincerely waiting for his teaching; however, he read the minds of some who thought they already listened to the Buddha Dharma well enough in the past with understanding them

and need not to listen to His complicated teachings any more. They thought they were different than other people, and thought that was enough!

Thereupon the Buddha said, "Sariputra, you are really gentle and honest. I understand what you said. You said that the congregation gathered here are obedient and waiting for my teaching in *gashho*. Because you are obedient, you think that they are too. I understand that there are so many people waiting for me to talk; however, there are some who are not satisfied with me. You asked me to expound the truth three times with enthusiasm. How can I leave the Dharma not expounded! Listen to me attentively. Now I will teach the Dharma to you and to all." So the Buddha finally decided to expound the truth.



NEW BOOKS



New Nichiren-Shu Service Book — DHARMA

Published by Nichiren Buddhist International Center

A long waited new liturgy book *Dharma* has finally been published. The new *Dharma* is a book showing how to hold a Nichiren-Shu service. You can use it at your temple and home. This book also includes a phrase a day. We carry them in order to understand Nichiren Shōnin's teachings in our daily lives with these 31 selected phrases. Please read them in between chanting sutras and the Odaimoku during services. Then you can reflect on these wonderful and important teachings of Nichiren Shōnin everyday. In addition to that, we have published it in the folding style. The old one was a binder style. It was easy to add readings to it but not easy to open it. The new *Dharma* is easy to open and read.

Many people wanted to have a copy of the old *Dharma*. However, it was for a temple or church's use only. It was not available for selling to the public. The new *Dharma* is for both temples/churches and the public. It will be comfortable to use this new small and thin *Dharma* even at home because of the new style.

You can purchase it at your temple or the NBIC.