

## ON THE VOWS AND SPIRITUAL

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The word, the Spiritual is not used so often, in our Nichiren Sect. It is originally the Christian language. In Japan, The first man who studied the question of the Spiritual is Professor Daisetsu Suzuki (1870—1966).

First, I'm going to explain the outline of the word. In Germany, for example, the word 'der Geist' is usually used for both meanings, spirit and the Spiritual. But if it is demanded the special meaning as a technical term, 'die Göttlichkeit' is used to emphasize the religious element. It is understood from this example of the Germany that the Spiritual, die Göttlichkeit, doesn't mean moral patterns but the source of human livings or a principle to run intelligence, emotion, and intention in the deep mind. It means a sublime religious consciousness.

Second, the word, the vow, is included the intention such as a prayer or a wish. In fact, the will to perform by all means operates powerfully upon the vow. To perform great things, one sometimes feels mental pain or undergoes it physically. To surmount them, however, is really what the vow should essentially be. To do so makes him feel religious exultation as a Buddhist.

In this meaning, the vow must be a significant opportunity to deepen the Spiritual of a Buddhist, which may drive his anxiety away and make him advance to a gateway to a firm vower.

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From the view point of the history of Japanese Buddhism thought, 13th century is called "the Age of Religious Reformation" and so called Kamakura New Buddhism was formed by reformist and creative buddhists at this age. Namely, the New Buddhism was developed by St. Honen and St. Eisai and after that St. Shinran and St. Dogen completed the Buddhist doctrine and thought. And at last Nichiren put the New Buddhism spirit —mercy— into practice.

We have some important questions of the vows, for example, about practice activities, personalities, and existence of religionists. In any case, all of them are concerned with how religionists should be.

I'm going to state my opinion based on my experience of "an East-west Exchange on Spiritual Level" in 1979, mainly about Nichiren's vows that I believe.

I was permitted to live together in Monastery, for the first time to a Buddhist of Nichiren Sect, Japanese Buddhism. In autumn of 1979, I luckily had a chance to make sure of a spiritual exchange with more than hundred monks for three months at Saint Ottilien Monastery in West Germany. Monks there devote themselves to strict religious life and make it a rule to pray, work, and learn, read, as their creeds. They confirm themselves in love devoted to others and faith by living in honest poverty, obedience and chastity of three great vows, to accomplish their religious life. To vow also means to pray firmly to practice affection and to have mercy on others supported by firm faith.

On Sunday, September 23, 1979, I was given a chance to take part in the ceremony of vows of religion of two monks at Saint Ottilien.

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They sacrifice themselves for Jesus, throwing off their all worldly connections, such as honor, social status, and pleasure. They learn and deepen their faith. They sometimes go on the remote region with the Cross on their back, and they are always ready to die a martyr. They swear honest poverty, modesty, and submission to God, and vow to be servants of God.

But, the very day of the ceremony is just the day of their eternal leaving from their parents, brothers, and sisters. It is symbolized by the words of a ten-year-old boy, a younger brother of the monk. He said, "He was summoned by God and will not come back to us." Monks to vow are absorbed in Christian world and veiled in religious exultation to live in faith. But, for the left families, it meant to lose their sons. They have religious exultation to sacrifice their son to Jesus on one hand, but on the other hand, they are in great sorrow for losing their sons. It teaches us that feeling sorrow for leaving is in the different level from their faith. On the day of the ceremony, a silence of the cathedral of Saint Ottilien was broken by their moaning and full of sorrowful tears. At this scene, I found the question of vows must be referred to concerning in a human nature, such as sorrow of farewell or pains of separation. And it must be thought not only logically but also in relation to spiritual backed by a firm faith.

While I was staring two young monks full of joy and their families on the contrary with sorrow, I myself could not keep back my tears for a great impression. It made me consider Nichiren's vows I believe.

When he was twelve years old, Nichiren (1222-1282) became a disciple of a famous temple of Japanese Tendai Sect, Kiyosumi, to learn.

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When sixteen, he converted, named himself Rencho, and made a vow to become a true Buddhist, the best Buddhist in Japan, to Kokuzo Bodhisattva, the principal idol of worship of the temple.

To perform his vow, he had been studying at many temples, of Kamakura, Kyoto, Koya, and Hiei for 16 years, from his 16 to 32 years old. In spring, when he was 32, he arrived at religious conversion.

He made a vow to become a believer in The Lotus of the Truth, Saddharmapundarika-sutra, the highest dharma in the teaching of Buddha. As a proof of it, he changed his name to Nichiren from Rencho. In his name Nichiren, his life and religious idea was included. So, 'Nichi' of Nichiren means the sun shining brightly in the sky. As the sun gives blessing and warm light to all the people, he himself hoped to shine and to live a life of the Lotus of the Truth in the latter days of the Buddhism. 'Ren' of Nichiren means a lotus flower coming purely from a bog. It means his hope to be a pure religionist, not to be polluted by dirt of the final darkness. He made a vow to live a religious life symbolized by the sun and a lotus flower<sup>(1)</sup>. In fact, that his life was suitable for them is proved by his religious activity expanding the Lotus of the Truth (the highest dharma), getting over frequent persecution and crises.

Nichiren made a religious proclamation when he was 32 years old. He took a vow to become a believer in the Lotus of the Truth, Saddharma-pundarika-sutra, the highest dharma of the teaching of Buddha.

But even Nichiren was a man. Although he was prepared for dying

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a martyr for the teaching of Buddha, when he actually left his parents, left his home, Nichiren was distressed by anxiety about welfare of his parents in home, and sorrow of leaving. Nichiren wrote about his anxious feelings in his two significant books, Kaimoku-sho, and Hoon-sho, whether to go ahead or back, whether to say or not to say. He confessed spiritual complication at the point of alternative selection.

Nichiren, however, made a vow decisively. He vowed that "he must expand the Truth (Dharma) for he bore obligation of people, native land, parents and Buddha"<sup>(2)</sup>, and that "he would sacrifice himself for the Truth (Dharma) and save all the people at the sacrifice of his own life"<sup>(3)</sup>.

Now, we can find, so to speak, self-consciousness of the successor of the Truth (Dharma) who directly succeed the teaching of Buddha, no concern with time, in the consciousness of the convert to devote himself to the Lotus of the Truth.

As mentioned above, we can see that Nichiren's vow was the declaration to read the spirit of the Lotus of the Truth and the teaching of Buddha, by his body. To read the teaching of Buddha by one's body means to practice it and the Buddha's spirit of mercy at the risk of one's life. We must understand the question between Nichiren's vow and spiritual in concerning with his life to secure people by practicing the spirit of the Scripture mercy.

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- (1) The source of the name 'Nichiren' is the following sentences in the Lotus of the Truth.

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日…神力品「如日月光明・能除諸幽冥・斯人行世間・能滅衆生闇」  
Nichi Nichi

蓮…涌出品「善学菩薩道・不染世間法・如蓮華在水」  
Ren Ren

- (2) Kaimoku-sho, one of Nichiren's theses.  
(3) Ibid.