

Question: What is the Hokkeko?

The original meaning of *ko* is “to lecture on the sutras.” It also indicated ceremonies where everyone gathered. Later, it came to mean “a gathering of practitioners.” Thus, “Hokkeko” means a gathering of the people who believe in the Daishonin’s correct teaching and strive to do Gongyo, Shodai, and shakubuku. The Daishonin himself used the name Hokkeko. We can understand this from the fact that the Dai-Gohonzon, enshrined in the Hoando, has the following inscription:

With great respect for the petitioner of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching, Yashiro Kunishige and the people of the Hokkeko.

The Second High Priest Nikko Shonin wrote in his “Letter to the Members of Sado”:

The believers of Nichiren Shoshu have been called “Hokkeko-shu” (members of the Hokkeko).

The roots of the Hokkeko come from the original believers in the Fuji Atsuhara district. They propagated the true Law and protected the Daishonin’s teachings, even though their lives were in danger. The Atsuhara Hokkeko members were new believers who recently had taken faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism. They strove in doing shakubuku under the leadership of Nikko Shonin.

Due to their efforts, many people in the region, including local farmers, became believers, and the Daishonin’s Buddhism spread. However, a powerful priest of another sect and others under his influence tried to stop them. Some of these members were arrested and told, “If you do not give up this practice, you will be beheaded.” But the Atsuhara Hokkeko members never stopped chanting. The central figures, Jinshiro, Yagoro, and Yarokuro were executed without being charged for any crimes. Even in the midst of this drastic situation, the farmers never gave up their faith and practice. They continued to uphold the Daishonin’s Buddhism. This incident is called the Atsuhara persecution.

Having witnessed this sincere faith of his disciples, the Daishonin knew that the time had come to reveal the purpose of his advent as the True Buddha in the Latter Day of the Law. Hence, on October 12, 1279 (second year of Koan), he

inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of the Essential Teaching.

Unlike the present time, there were eras when believers were unable to practice freely. Even under these circumstances, Hokkeko members strove in their faith and diligently practiced. Down through the ages, many people took faith in true Buddhism. They upheld faith in the Dai-Gohonzon and followed the guidance of the successive High Priests. Thus, the correct faith and practice of Nichiren Shoshu has been handed down to the present time. The Hokkeko members of today must follow the example of these believers and do shakubuku without begrudging their lives. This will ensure that the Daishonin's Buddhism will be propagated into the future.

The purpose of the Hokkeko is to protect the Head Temple Taisekiji and the local temples, and to practice together with fellow Hokkeko members, giving encouragement to each other. We should never cut ourselves off from the Head Temple and the local temples.

Most Hokkeko chapters are named after their local temple—for example, “Myogyoji Chapter.” The temple is the center. All Nichiren Shoshu believers belong to a local temple and practice under the guidance of the chief priest, who also is called the “guiding priest.”

Each chapter has a koto, who is the representative of the believers. There also are various officers who are called kanji. Some Hokkeko chapters have representatives for the young adult believers, the teenage members, and the children's group. Each officer and representative is making efforts to help our faith and practice become stronger. So it is important to cooperate with them.

People who practice with Nichiren Shoshu are all Hokkeko members. When a person receives Gojukai and has become a Nichiren Shoshu believer, he or she also becomes a Hokkeko member. The same is true for those who have returned to Nichiren Shoshu and received the Reaffirmation Ceremony.

High Priest Nichinyo Shonin often encourages us by stating, “When the chief priest and lay believers put their efforts together and take action, our goals will be achieved without fail.” All of our friends are important of course; however, the relationships we develop through the temple are extremely important, since we are connected through faith and practice. Let us happily participate in our various Hokkeko activities. Furthermore, let's achieve our chapter goals through chanting abundant Daimoku in total unity.