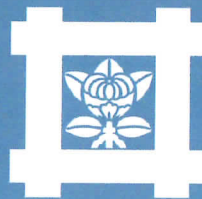


A feature of the Nichiren Order is that we have what is called the Kito Blessing which is unique in that it is based upon the Lotus Sutra. The Kito involves a particular technique which has been passed on orally from generation to generation. Before any priest can attempt to perform this Kito, he must have undergone an extremely rigorous regimen for at least a hundred days. This training is held just once a year from November the 1st to the 10th of February at a large Nichiren-shu temple called Nakayama Hokekyo-ji, in Ichikawa City of the Province of Chiba in Japan.



■ Situations Where the Kito is Performed

The most basic kito prayer is for the maintenance of one's health. Without health, we cannot serve or help others, which should be our mission in life as Buddhists. However, the kito is performed on various occasions. To mention just a few, many temples perform traffic safety kito prayers during New Year's to ensure one's safety on the road. Another very popular kito is to protect one's home from fire and natural disasters, and that one would be safe and prosper in one's home. Other more specialized situations include performing the kito to aid one to fulfill their objectives. Expectant mothers often receive prayers so that they may have a safe delivery and be endowed with a healthy child. School children often receive the kito to aspire and further their studies. Business owners often wish to receive prayers for inspiration to advance their hard work.



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祈祷
Kito





■ Nakayama Hokekyo-ji Temple

The training at Hokekyo-ji is so rigorous that applicants must agree to releasing its administrators from responsibility should something inopportune happen to them. Trainees enter the gates of Hokekyo-ji with a very determined disposition knowing that they will not be allowed outside its gates for a period of one hundred days of physically demanding monastic training. Trainees are expected to endure many hardships beginning with the harsh winter cold, along with limited food and sleep. A typical day during the 100-day “aragyō” training involves being awakened at about 3:00 in the morning, and going straight outside in the cold with barely anything to wear to offer prayers and pouring seven buckets of cold water upon oneself (suigyō), an act of purifying oneself of negative karma to be able to shoulder the great responsibilities that come with the performance of the Kito. Once this is done, they all commence with the morning service. Once the reading of the sutra begins in the morning, it is not allowed to terminate until everyone retires for sleep which happens after the last suigyō of the day at 11:00 PM. In essence, one is able to get a mere three hours of sleep time per day. And during their wakened hours, everyone is required to perform the water purification ritual seven times per day. Meals, only of rice porridge with miso soup, are taken only twice per day, leaving the priests in a constant malnourished state for one hundred days. The robes that these priests wear are very sheer and offer insufficient protection from the bitter cold of the winter months during which the 100-day practice is held. These harsh conditions physically weaken the aspirant, causing one to catch a cold that can easily lead to pneumonia. But, each practitioner enters Nakayama with full knowledge of this, that their predecessors all endured this hardship to attain the knowledge of the Kito, which is only transmitted orally. The practicing priests endure these hardships to purify their body and mind to be able to perform the kito blessing which not only imposes an inordinate amount of energy, but also requires a fortitude of moral integrity and compassion.

■ Basic Notion Behind the Kito

The Nichiren Shu Kito is based upon the basic Buddhist principle of causation. Our present situation is thought to be determined by our speech and actions that we have performed in the past. Similarly, we can expect that our present speech and actions would affect our situation in the future. So, if one believes that his or her present situation is not good, one can expect that there must have been some decision or occurrence in the past that triggered a series of action upon action that begot the present situation in which one is placed. Within this often long and complicated process, we can assume that decisions that were not conducive to producing good results had been made. We, as humans, are often unable to foresee far into the future enough to prevent bad situations. Hence, before we realize it, many times, we are in a situation that is not favorable. It is not always the case that we are able to prevent bad occurrences because there are times when causes come upon us from sources of which we have little control. But, even these, according to our founder, Nichiren Shonin, can be controlled. We have spoken of unfavorable situations; but, by the same token, good results are not necessarily brought on by good luck. They are the result of a conscientious effort to do well. As we all know, it is rare that one would not do well on an exam for which one has studied very hard.

The assumption of the Kito blessing performed by a practitioner of the Kito, then, is a sincere effort to right the causative process which may have gone awry. For example, although the Kito is performed for many purposes, one situation in which it is performed is before a house or structure is to be built. A prayer would be made on or near where the structure would be built to gain the approval of the local gods and deities which oversee the specific area and to clear all faulty connections to guarantee that there will be no problems in the future.

■ How Should One Approach the Kito

Perhaps, the important point to remember is that issues will be corrected with one’s conscientious effort to follow the teachings of the Buddha as is preached in the Lotus Sutra. The priest performing the Kito blessing must necessarily conduct the service to lead one into the true path of the Lotus Sutra. The person or persons receiving the blessing must have complete faith in the Lotus Sutra, and be determined to live according to the Buddha’s teachings. In this way, the recipient of the blessing is thought to gain the blessing and protection of the Buddha and all other deities of the Lotus Sutra.

Kishimojin is often the deity before which the Kito is performed. The tale behind the Kishimojin is that she was once an awful mother who though having many children of her own, took the children of others and ate them. She would finally be taught a lesson by the Buddha when he took and hid one of Kishimojin’s many children. When she could not find her child, Kishimojin became delirious and desperate. She finally approached the Buddha hoping that he may be able to help. Kishimojin would break down in tears before the Buddha and begged for his help. The Buddha admonished her saying, “You have many many children, yet you hurt when even one of your children has disappeared. Why do you take and eat the children of others?” Kishimojin repented and promised never to steal or eat another child; rather she vowed to henceforth be a protector of children. With this, the Buddha returned her missing child. Kishimojin makes an appearance in the 26th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in which she represents the protector of all believers of the Lotus Sutra. It is because of this that Nichiren Shonin includes the Kishimojin in his Great Mandala Go-honzon, and that the Kito is often performed before the Kishimojin.



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