

SGI-UK Study Courses and Exams 2009



photo by Daisaku Ikeda, shinanomachi, Tokyo, Japan, July 1991

**Without Practice and Study, there can
be no Buddhism**

Extracts from guidance on study by SGI President Ikeda

The Gosho is a work of faith, of philosophy, of daily living of eternal peace and boundless hope. It is set with myriad jewels of guidance. SGI members have read a single passage of the Gosho with their entire life and not only changed their lives for the better but also achieved their human revolution.

What is the purpose of studying the Gosho? The answer is expressed clearly in the following passage:

Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of devotion in all of Jambudvīpa. Be sure to strengthen your faith, and receive the protection of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions. Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase. (WND, p. 386)

The main elements of the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism are summed up in this passage. What is important is first faith, second practice and third study. Strong faith leads us directly to Buddhahood. And it is practice and study that strengthen and deepen that faith. For us study must never be a mere accumulation of knowledge. It must be strictly a practical study to deepen one's own faith and elevate one's own state of life.

Moreover the path of practice and study leads to the Gohonzon and to society. Because of practice and study, we face the Gohonzon, recite the sutra and chant daimoku. With the wisdom and life force gained thereby, we carry out our practice and study in the midst of society. Herein lies what we call the bodhisattva way. That is the action of leading other people toward lasting happiness while striving to establish enduring peace for humanity. That practice begins with the inner reformation of the individual, and through that practice the substance of our lives is deepened and enriched. The ultimate of those changes is the attainment of Buddhahood in this lifetime, or in modern terms, human revolution or self-actualization.

The Daishonin writes:

The heart of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the "Never Disparaging" chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being. (WND, p. 852)

It is when the fruits of studying the Gosho show in our own behaviour that we can say we have truly read it.

Source: Forward From Volume 1 of Daisaku Ikeda, *The World of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings* (SGI-Malaysia, 2003) pp. xii and xiv.

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Section A. Nichiren Daishonin's Life

Childhood period

Nichiren Daishonin was born on 16 February 1222, into a fishing family in the village of Kominato, in the region of Awa (presently in the Chiba prefecture). His parents called him Zennichimaro ('Splendid Sun'). At the age of 11 he became a novice-monk at Seicho-ji temple, near Mount Kiyosumi in Awa; in those days there were no schools, and temples served as centres of learning. Initially, Seicho-ji was attached to the Tendai school [1], which taught the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra. Later it fell under the influence of first the True Word school [2], with its mystic rituals, and later the Pure Land school [3], which taught belief in Amida Buddha. There was much confusion within Buddhism at that time about what was the true or correct teaching.

Becoming the wisest person of Japan

As Zennichimaro advanced in his studies, serious doubts arose in his mind about Buddhist teachings and their effect on the society of his time. How was it that the doctrines taught by the Buddha had given rise to schools with such contradictory tenets? And why, despite sincere Buddhist prayers for peace, had Japan been subjected to years of conflict? Zennichimaro prayed to a statue of Bodhisattva Space Treasury to become the wisest person in Japan. In a letter to a follower in 1277, Nichiren Daishonin wrote, 'Since childhood, I, Nichiren, have never prayed for the secular things of this life but have single-mindedly sought to become a Buddha.' (WND p. 839)

The years of study

In his search for truth, Zennichimaro thoroughly studied the doctrines of the Eight Schools [4] as well as those of the later Zen and Jodo schools, and on 8 October 1237, in his sixteenth year, was ordained a priest by Dozen-bo, the chief priest of Seicho-ji. In becoming a priest he took the religious name Zesho-bo Rencho [5]. For a while Rencho remained at Seicho-ji but, probably during the spring of 1239 at the age of seventeen, journeyed to Kamakura, where the shogunate was based, to further his studies. He briefly returned to Seicho-ji in the spring of 1242 before undertaking a second study journey, to Nara and Kyoto. Rencho spent 12 years at the temples of Nara and the monasteries of Mount Hiei and Mount Koya [6], near Kyoto, and read all the important Buddhist texts he could. After some fourteen years of study, he finally became convinced that Shakyamuni's ultimate teaching was found in the Lotus Sutra.

Proclamation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo

When Rencho returned at the end of his long years of study, his old master, Dozen-bo, was very proud of him. To celebrate his return and to discover the depth of his knowledge, the priests organised a meeting at which Rencho was to preach a sermon, and invited dignitaries from the surrounding area. Very early on the morning of 28 April 1253 he chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for the first time. Later that day a large audience duly gathered and at noon Rencho appeared and recited Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times, declaring it to be the only teaching that would enable all human beings in the Latter Day of the Law to reach supreme enlightenment in this lifetime. His audience was surprised - no one had ever heard this invocation before. Rencho declared that he had taken a new name, Nichiren ('Sun Lotus'), and then refuted the four most influential Buddhist schools of the time. He criticised

the Nembutsu School because of its teaching that salvation could be attained through the external power of an absolute being; Zen for its assertion that enlightenment could only be arrived through the direct perception of one's own mind and with being content with that self-enlightenment; The True World School for teaching that benefit could be gained through mystic practices; and The Precepts School because of its focus on controlling people through strict precepts and rituals. In pronouncing these so-called 'four dictums'- Nichiren Daishonin [7] effectively declared that none of the existing Buddhist schools had the power to save humanity, and that practising their teachings actually caused suffering to individuals and society. When the steward of the region, Tojo Kagenobu, a fervent believer of the Pure Land school, heard that Nichiren Daishonin had predicted the hell of incessant suffering to all those who practised it, he immediately issued an arrest warrant. With the help of Dozen-bo and others, Nichiren Daishonin escaped. In the summer of 1253, Nichiren Daishonin went to Kamakura and settled in the small hermitage of Matsubagayatsu. In November 1253, a travelling priest became the first of Nichiren Daishonin's disciples. He later became the eldest of the six elder priests, taking the name Nissho. Other disciples followed. Some were priests, others belonged to the families of samurai. Among these first disciples were Toki Jonin, Shijo Kingo, Kudo Yoshitaka and Ikegami Munenaka

On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the peace of the Land

During this period, famine and epidemics were ravaging the country. After the great Kamakura earthquake of May 1257, tremors shook the region, culminating in another huge earthquake in August, and again in November. In August 1258 violent winds ravaged Kamakura and a tempest hit Kyoto. In October 1258 torrential rain beat down on Kamakura, causing a flood that killed many people. In March 1259 and in April 1260, in accordance with custom, the government proclaimed new eras in order to try to surmount these calamities, to no avail: the extraordinary phenomena continued unabated. In 1258, Nichiren Daishonin went to Jisso-ji, a temple in Iwamoto that contained in its library all of Shakyamuni's sutras. There he met a twelve-year-old novice, Hoki-bo, who soon expressed the desire to become his disciple. In time, as Nikko Shonin, he would become Nichiren Daishonin's immediate successor.

The Daishonin consulted all the sutras in Jisso-ji's library, seeking to determine the fundamental cause of, and remedy to, human suffering, in particular the suffering then being experienced by the Japanese people. He concluded that the nation's misfortunes sprang from its disregard and slander of the Lotus Sutra. In several places, Shakyamuni makes it clear that his fundamental teachings are only found in the Lotus Sutra. All the Buddhist schools in Japan at this period, however, with the exception of the Tendai school, were founded on Shakyamuni's provisional teachings, expounded prior to the Lotus Sutra. Even the Tendai school, which was originally based on the Lotus Sutra, had become sullied by the teachings of the True Word and Pure Land schools.

The First Remonstrance with the Government

Nichiren Daishonin formulated the conclusion of his research in a treatise entitled 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land'. On 16 July 1260, he presented this treatise to Hojo Tokiyori, the retired regent but still Japan's most influential political figure. The treatise is known as Nichiren Daishonin's first remonstrance with the government, and begins with a description of the misery of the era:

Once there was a traveller who spoke these words in sorrow to his host: 'In recent years, there have been unusual disturbances in the heavens, strange occurrences

on earth, famine and pestilence, all affecting every corner of the empire and spreading throughout the land. Oxen and horses lie dead in the streets and the bones of the stricken crowd the highways. Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and there is hardly a single person who does not grieve.’

(WND, p. 6)

Nichiren Daishonin expressed his conviction that the fundamental cause of the disasters that had struck the country lay in the fact that everyone, ‘from the sovereign to the most humble’, was opposed to or ignorant of the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. He particularly criticised Honen, the founder of the Pure Land school. Quoting the Great Collection sutra and the Medicine Master sutras, which elaborate the three calamities and the seven disasters [8], Nichiren Daishonin predicted that civil war and foreign invasion, the only disasters that had not yet occurred, would surely happen if the country continued to reject correct teaching, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Nichiren Daishonin knew perfectly well that he would encounter violent persecution if he addressed his treatise to Hojo Tokiyori, but did so nonetheless from profound compassion, considering the sufferings of others as though they were his own. Sure enough, priests and believers of the Pure Land school soon took action against Nichiren Daishonin and his disciples.

Persecution at Matsubagayatsu and Exile to Izu

During the night of 27 August 1260, several hundred Pure Land followers attacked Nichiren Daishonin’s dwelling at Matsubagayatsu. The action was instigated by Hojo Shigetoki, father of the current regent Hojo Nagatoki and a Pure Land school follower. Fortunately, Nichiren Daishonin managed to escape and took refuge at the house of one of his disciples, Toki Jonin. In spite of the danger, Nichiren Daishonin returned to Kamakura the following spring and once again began to propagate his teachings. His overwhelming desire was to awaken the Japanese people to the truth of Buddhism.

The Pure Land school priests continued to slander Nichiren Daishonin to the authorities. This time the regent himself, Hojo Nakatoki, supported their accusations and on 12 May 1261, without even a court case, the government sent Nichiren Daishonin into exile to Ito, a Pure Land school stronghold on the Izu peninsula.

He was abandoned on a beach by his guards as they reached Ito and left to his fate. Despite the hostility felt towards exiles, Nichiren Daishonin was taken in and cared for by a fisherman called Funamaori Yasuburo and his wife. Later, they became his disciples. This clearly shows the affinity Nichiren Daishonin had with ordinary people, a feeling that was increasingly reciprocated during his lifetime. Shortly thereafter, hearing that the local steward was ill, Nichiren Daishonin successfully prayed for his recovery: the lord also became a follower.

In February 1263, after almost two years in Izu, the Daishonin was pardoned. As he explains in ‘On Persecutions Befalling the Sage’, ‘the lay priest of Saimyo-ji [Hojo-Tokiyori 1227-1263], now deceased, and the priest ruler [Hojo Tokimune 1251-1284] permitted my return from my exile when they found I was innocent of the accusations against me’. (WND, p. 997) It is also likely that Hojo Tokiyori understood Nichiren Daishonin’s true intention in sending him ‘On Establishing the Correct Teaching’ in July 1260, and shared his desire to protect the Japanese people from further catastrophes. Once pardoned, the Daishonin returned to Kamakura.

The Komatsubara Persecution

In autumn 1264, learning about the serious illness of his mother, Nichiren Daishonin decided to visit Awa for the first time in ten years. His father had died in 1258. On 11 November 1264, on his way to visit his disciple Kudo Yoshitaka, his old enemy Tojo Kagenobu, steward of the region, ambushed the Daishonin and his disciples at a place called Komatsubara. Hearing of the attack, Yoshitaka rushed to the scene with some other followers. But they were outnumbered and Yoshitaka and another follower, Kyonin-bo, were killed. Although he escaped safely, Nichiren Daishonin himself was injured on the forehead by a sword and had his left arm broken. This incident is known as the Komatsubara Persecution.

Nichiren Daishonin returned to Kamakura in early 1268. In January of that year an envoy from the Mongol Empire had arrived in Kamakura with a message demanding that Japan acknowledge fealty to their empire, or face invasion. The envoy was sent back empty-handed and the Japanese government began to prepare for war. This confirmed Nichiren Daishonin's prediction of foreign invasion, made in 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching'. In April 1268, Nichiren Daishonin sent 'The Rationale for writing "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land"' to an active member of the government. In it he explained the circumstances leading to his writing the treatise, and reminded the shogunate of its conclusions:

Now, nine years after I presented my memorial [to the lay priest of Saimyo-ji], in the intercalary first month of this year [1268], the official letter arrived from the great kingdom of the Mongols. The events that have occurred match the predictions made in my memorial as exactly as do the two halves of a tally. (WND, p. 163)

In October, he sent letters to eleven high-ranking political and religious leaders pointing out that his predictions were now being fulfilled, and calling for a public religious debate to demonstrate the validity of his teachings. His appeal was ignored. Nichiren Daishonin was a man of great learning, reason enough for the religious leaders of Kamakura to refuse to debate with him. But he knew that there was another reason for their refusal, which had been clearly stated in the thirteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra:

These men with evil in their hearts,
constantly thinking of worldly affairs,
will borrow the name of forest-dwelling monks... [9]

In short, he knew them to be hypocrites who preached doctrines they themselves could or would not put into action.

The second warning to the government

In 1271, Japan suffered a severe drought and the government asked Ryokan, chief priest of the True Word-Precepts school, and considered the foremost Buddhist scholar of the city, to pray for rain. When Nichiren Daishonin heard this, he issued a public challenge, vowing to become Ryokan's disciple if he managed to make it rain within seven days. If Ryokan failed, however, he should become the Daishonin's disciple. Ryokan accepted the challenge, but was humiliated when his prayers failed. Rather than discarding his beliefs, however, he plotted to get rid of his rival. Conspiring with his followers, he began to spread false rumours about the Daishonin among the wives of leading government officials.

The tactic worked. On 10 September 1271, Nichiren Daishonin was summoned and questioned by Hei no Saemon, Deputy Chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs (the chief being the regent himself). Nichiren Daishonin repeated his prediction that the nation would fall into ruin if the true Law continued to be slandered. This encounter is known as the second remonstrance with the government. Writing of this meeting in the Goshō, 'The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra', Nichiren Daishonin warns Hei no Saemon:

If you wish to maintain this land in peace and security, it is imperative that you summon the priests of the other schools for a debate in your presence. If you ignore this advice and punish me unreasonably on their behalf, the entire country will regret your decision. If you condemn me, you will be rejecting the Buddha's envoy... (WND, p.765)

The meeting ended without agreement.

The Tatsunokuchi Persecution

On the night of 12 September 1271, Hei no Saemon and a troop of armed soldiers arrested Nichiren Daishonin. Treating him like a traitor, they took him to Tatsunokuchi beach, an execution site near Kamakura: on his own initiative, Hei no Saemon had decided to have Nichiren Daishonin beheaded. On the way to Tatsunokuchi the arresting party passed the shrine to Hachiman, one of Japan's protective deities. The Daishonin asked to stop and at once he reprimanded Hachiman:

Great Bodhisattva Hachiman, are you truly a god? ... I, Nichiren, am the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in all of Japan, and an entirely without guilt... When Shakyamuni Buddha expounded the Lotus Sutra, Many Treasures Buddha and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions gathered, shining like so many suns and moons, stars and mirrors. In the presence of the countless heavenly gods as well as the benevolent deities and sages of India, China, and Japan, Shakyamuni Buddha urged each one to submit a written pledge to protect the votary of the Lotus Sutra at all times. Each and every one of you gods made this pledge. I should not have to remind you. Why do you not appear at once to fulfil your solemn oath?' ...If I am executed tonight and go to the pure land of Eagle Peak, I will dare to report to Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, that the Sun Goddess and Great Bodhisattva Hachiman are the deities who have broken their oath to him. If you feel this will go hard with you, you had better do something about it right away! (WND, p. 767)

So saying, Nichiren Daishonin remounted his horse and the party continued on to Tatsunokuchi. Sent for by his master, Shijo Kingo [10] rushed barefoot to join him, with his three brothers. He held the reins of Nichiren Daishonin's horse until they reached the execution site, ready to give his own life. At the moment when Nichiren Daishonin was about to be beheaded, however, a bright object crossed the sky. Panicking, the executioner threw away his sword and the petrified soldiers were unable to proceed with the execution. This event is of the utmost significance. Not only did the Buddhist gods [11] protect Nichiren Daishonin, saving him from death, but at this crucial moment he revealed his true identity as the original Buddha by discarding his provisional or transient identity as 'the votary of the Lotus Sutra':

On the twelfth day of the ninth month of last year, between the hours of the Rat and the Ox (11 pm to 3 am), this person named Nichiren was beheaded. It is his soul that has come to the island of Sado.' (WND, p. 269)

Exile to Sado Island

The authorities detained Nichiren Daishonin, at Echi, Sagami prefecture, as they tried to decide what to do. The verdict was exile once more, and so, on 10 October 1271, he was taken north from Echi, to Sado Island in the Sea of Japan. Here, on 1 November, he was forced to settle in a small, ruined temple in an old cemetery at Tsukahara. He had no warm clothes or enough food to sustain him against the terrible, cold weather. Moreover, the inhabitants of the island were very hostile; not only were they mainly Pure Land school believers, but exiles to Sado were, for the most part, common criminals.

The authorities did not expect the Daishonin to survive the winter, but far from dying, Nichiren Daishonin increasingly won support from the local population and converted many individuals to his teachings, including Abutsu-bo and his wife, Ko Nyudo and his wife, Nakaoki Nyudo and Sairen-bo Nichijyo.

The leaders of the other Buddhist schools were not satisfied, even with their foe in exile. Early in 1272 scores of priests converged on the island from their home provinces. But the deputy constable, Homma Shigetsura, dashed their hopes for a quick end to their enemy by telling them:

An official letter from the regent directs that the priest shall not be executed. This is no ordinary, contemptible criminal, and if anything happens to him, I, Shigetsura, will be guilty of grave dereliction. Instead of killing him, why don't you confront him in religious debate? (WND, p. 771)

The 'Tsukahara Debate' - as it became known - duly took place on 16-17 January 1272, pitting Nichiren Daishonin against several hundred priests of the other schools. He describes the event in the Gosho 'The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra':

I responded to each, establishing the exact meaning of what had been said, then coming back with questions. However, I needed to ask only one or two at most before they were completely silenced... I overturned them as easily as a sharp sword cutting through a melon or a gale bending the grass. They not only were poorly versed in the Buddhist teachings but contradicted themselves. They confused sutras with treatises or commentaries with treatises. (WND, pp.771-772)

After the debate, many of those attending abandoned their beliefs, or even converted to the Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. In February, the predictions of a civil war made by the Daishonin twelve years earlier, in 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching', became reality when conflicts arose within the ruling Hojo clan, which culminated in violent clashes at both Kamakura and Kyoto. The government began to take Nichiren Daishonin more seriously and he was transferred in April from his hut at Tsukahara to an ordinary residence at Ichinosawa on Sado Island.

Shortly after the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, while still on the mainland, Nichiren Daishonin had begun to inscribe personal Gohonzon for his closest followers. On Sado, he produced many important writings including, 'The Opening of the Eyes', 'The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind', 'The Entity of the Mystic Law' and 'Letter from Sado'. These are so important because they explain the significance of the Gohonzon and, in so doing, lay the foundations of the Daishonin's teachings. For example, 'The Opening of the Eyes' explains why the Daishonin is the person qualified to establish the Gohonzon. 'The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind' explains why Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the Law to be established, why in the form of the Gohonzon, and why the present period is the correct time for the establishment of the supreme object of devotion.

The End of Exile

In February 1274, the then regent, Hojo Tokimune, granted Nichiren Daishonin permission to leave Sado Island. This was probably motivated by two events that took place in 1273: the attempted rebellion of Hojo Tokimune's brother, and the arrival, once again, of a Mongol delegation to Japan. Both confirmed the Daishonin's predictions.

The third remonstrance with the government and departure for Mount Minobu

He left Ichinosawa on 13 March for Kamakura and on 8 April met Hei no Saemon at the latter's request. For the third time, he remonstrated with the government, warning that the Mongol invasion was imminent, but still the government refused to listen. A few months later, in October, Kublai Khan's forces attacked the southern part of Japan. According to ancient Chinese custom, if a sage gives three warnings to the authorities and these warnings go unheeded, he should retire to a mountain retreat. Therefore, Nichiren Daishonin retired to the remoteness of Mount Minobu, in present-day Yamanashi prefecture. At Minobu he would continue to write and to raise disciples capable of propagating the Law.

He devoted much of his time to writing, and nearly half of his extant works date from this period. He also spent much time lecturing and training his disciples, in particular Nikko Shonin. Nikko Shonin faithfully recorded these lectures in the 'The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings'.

The Atsuhara Persecution and fulfilment of the Daishonin's mission

In 1275, Nikko Shonin took the lead in propagating Nichiren Daishonin's teachings in the Fuji area, centred on the village of Atsuhara, and succeeded in converting many lay people (mostly farmers) and priests. One strong lay supporter in the area was Nanjo Tokimitsu, who, though still only in his late teens, contributed wholeheartedly to the propagation movement.

The propagation caused intense opposition from the local temples. In particular, the assistant chief priest of a Tendai temple in Atsuhara village, Gyochi, grew increasingly jealous. Seeing his income threatened, he began to harass the Daishonin's followers and falsely accused twenty disciples of stealing rice while harvesting the temple's fields. He conspired to have them arrested and taken to Kamakura on 21 September 1279, where he tried to force them to renounce their faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. They refused, even under torture and the threat of death. Meanwhile, Nanjo Tokimitsu fought at the risk of his life to protect the Law and his precious fellow believers, despite severe government reprisals - he was so heavily taxed, for example, that he even had to sell his horse, a vital necessity.

Nichiren Daishonin was deeply moved by the attitude of these disciples, who were ready to give their lives if need be to defend the Law. Realising that the time had come for him to fulfil his ultimate purpose in life, on 12 October 1279, he inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon. In the Goshu 'On Persecutions Befalling the Sage', he discusses the significance of this event:

Now, in the second year of Koan [1279], cyclical sign tsuchinoto-u, it has been twenty-seven years since I first proclaimed this teaching at Seicho-ji temple. It was at the hour of the horse [noon] on the twenty-eighth day of the fourth month in the fifth year of Kencho [1253], cyclical sign mizunoto-ushi, on the southern side

of the image hall in the Shobutsu-bo of Seicho-ji temple in Tojo Village. Tojo is now a district, but was then a part of Nagasa District of Awa Province. Here is located what was once the second, but is now the country's most important centre founded by Minamoto no Yoritomo, the general of the right, to the Sun Goddess. The Buddha fulfilled the purpose of his advent in a little over forty years, the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai took about thirty years, and the Great Teacher Dengyo, some twenty years. I have spoken repeatedly of the indescribable persecutions they suffered during those years. For me it took twenty-seven years, and the great persecutions I faced during this period are well known to you all. (WND, p. 996)

Three days later, on 15 October, three of the farmer-disciples held in Kamakura were beheaded. The seventeen others still refused to recant, and were banished from Atsuhara. The harassment of the Daishonin's followers continued intermittently for a time. Collectively, the persecution of his followers in and around Atsuhara from 1275 to 1281 is known as the Atsuhara Persecution.

Transmission of the Law and the death of Nichiren Daishonin

By 1280, Nichiren Daishonin had already decided upon Nikko Shonin as his successor, as he states in the document that he transferred to him, 'The One Hundred and Six Comparisons'. Nikko was clearly foremost among his disciples in faith, practice and study. He accompanied and served Nichiren Daishonin twice in exile (in Izu and on Sado), and he was also the most active in propagation activities and in training other disciples. Nikko had a deep respect for Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha for this age, and understood the profound meaning of his teachings from the viewpoint of faith. He was therefore the person to whom Nichiren Daishonin transferred all his teachings and the Dai-Gohonzon, inscribed for all humankind, in September 1282. He formally certified Nikko as his successor and the leader of the propagation of his Buddhism in the 'Document for Entrusting the Law Which Nichiren Propagated throughout His Life'.

Shortly after this, on 8 September 1282, his health deteriorating further, the Daishonin left Mount Minobu, where he had lived for nine years, and went to the Hitachi hot springs en route to the residence of one of his lifelong followers, Ikegami Munenaka. Here, in Musashi (present day Tokyo), he drew up his final testament for the future. On 8 October he designated six senior priests as his most important priest-disciples - Nissho, Nichiro, Nikko, Niko, Nitcho and Nichiji - and entrusted them with the mission to train and develop followers in the different regions of Japan.

On 13 October, just before his death, Nichiren Daishonin wrote a second transfer document, 'Document for Entrusting Minobu-san', again designating Nikko as his legitimate successor. In this he entrusts all of his teachings to Nikko and appoints him high priest of Kuon temple. [12]

At Ikegami Munenaka's home that same day, aged 60, Nichiren Daishonin passed away.

This article is an adaptation of an article already on the SGI European Study website. It is also published in the November 2004 edition of SGI-UK's study magazine Art of Living [pp. 14-21].

Footnotes:

1. A school founded by Dengyo in Japan. Its head temple is Enryaku-ji on Mount Hiei. In 804 Dengyo made the journey to T'ang China, where he completed his study of the T'ien-t'ai (Jp. Tendai) teachings. He returned to Japan in 805 and officially founded the Tendai school in 806. Jikaku and Chisho, respectively the third and fifth chief priests of Enryaku-ji, incorporated esoteric teachings into the doctrine of the Tendai school. Hence the Tendai school in Japan rapidly assumed the character of esotericism, differing in this respect from

the Chinese.

2. True Word school. A reference to the Chinese Chen-yen school and the Japanese Shingon school. (Shingon, or true word, is the Japanese pronunciation of chen-yen.) It follows the esoteric doctrines found in the Mahavairochana and the Diamond Crown sutras, which were later introduced to Japan by Kobo.
3. Pure Land school. A school that teaches the attainment of rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha by means of the chanting of Amida's name. Honen is the founder of the Japanese Pure Land school. In Japan, the Pure Land school is also called the Nembutsu school.
4. The eight major schools of Buddhism in Japan before the Kamakura period (1185-1333).
5. The Chinese character ze is comprised of three radicals that signify 'the person', 'under' and 'the sun'; sho means 'sage' or 'sacred'; Rencho means 'lotus growth'.
6. Monasteries of Mount Hiei and Mount Koya: head temples, respectively, of the Tendai and True Word schools.
7. Daishonin - Literally, 'Great Sage'; an honorific title later given to Nichiren by his disciples.
8. A reference to two sets of three calamities - lesser and greater. The three lesser calamities are warfare, pestilence and famine. The calamity of famine is also called the calamity of high grain prices or inflation, because inflation was caused by a shortage of grain. The three greater calamities are those of fire, water and wind. These calamities occur at the end of a kalpa. The three lesser calamities are often referred to in conjunction with the seven disasters as the 'three calamities and seven disasters'.
9. LS13, p. 194
10. (1230-1300) Samurai and disciple of Nichiren Daishonin.
11. (Jp. shoten zenjin): benevolent heavenly beings. Traditionally, gods who assembled to listen to Shakyamuni teach the Lotus Sutra and vowed to guard its devotees, but interpreted to mean the life-supporting and protecting power inherent in the universe, including one's own life, which can be activated by one's Buddhist practice.
12. Kuon temple: built at Mount Minobu in November 1281.

SECTION B: THE PRINCIPLES OF FAITH IN SGI

On 1 April 2002 the foreword to the rules and regulations (or constitution), of the Soka Gakkai were revised. Although the regulations specifically concern only the Soka Gakkai in Japan, in terms of faith, they clarify the mission of SGI. The Foreword, which is set out below, clearly states the spiritual flow of Buddhism from Shakyamuni to Nichiren Daishonin to SGI, and confirms for the very first time that the spirit of the three Presidents will be our eternal guiding model. It also confirms that as members of SGI we are directly connected to the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin, embracing the Gohonzon, basing our movement on the Goshō, and carrying out activities for kosen-rufu through spreading Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō in exact accordance with the Daishonin's will and mandate.

THE SOKA GAKKAI'S RULES AND REGULATIONS (FOREWORD)

The Buddhist spirit of compassion and peace, first taught by Shakyamuni, is crystallised in the Lotus Sutra. This sutra represents the essence of Mahayana Buddhism and clearly sets forth teachings to lead all people to happiness. Nichiren Daishonin embodied the essence of the Lotus Sutra in the Three Great Secret Laws, establishing an eternally enduring path for saving humanity. The Soka Gakkai is a religious organisation in accord with the Buddha's will and mandate, established with the mission of spreading Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism worldwide (kosen-rufu). The organisation was founded on 18 November 1930 by the first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and second president, Josei Toda.

Presidents Makiguchi and Toda began the practice of propagation in the effort to realise kosen-rufu. As a result, during the Second World War, they were imprisoned by the national government, which used the state religion of Shintoism to enlist spiritual support for its policies, and the first president Makiguchi died in prison. First president Makiguchi, who taught Buddhism as a guide for daily living and a philosophy of value-creation, bequeathed to posterity the spirit of selfless dedication to spreading the Law by offering his life for Buddhism.

During his imprisonment, second president Josei Toda awakened to the ultimate truth that the Buddha is life itself, and to his own identity and mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth. Upholding the principle of human revolution, he revived and renewed the significance of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the contemporary world. He solidified the foundation for kosen-rufu in Japan by fulfilling his vow to enable 750,000 families to embrace this teaching in his lifetime. The third president, Daisaku Ikeda, has propagated Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism not only in Japan but throughout the world, applying the philosophy of Buddhism to the promotion of peace, culture and education. In this way he has opened the way for the worldwide propagation of Buddhism for the first time in its history.

The spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple, and the selfless practice of propagating the Law for the attainment of kosen-rufu, both embodied in the lives of the 'Three Successive Presidents' is the core of the 'Spirit of the Soka Gakkai'. Herein lies our eternal guiding model. The Soka Gakkai, rooted in the spirit of Buddhist compassion, shall be dedicated to realising world peace and happiness for all humanity.

Article 2 of the recently revised Rules and Regulations articulates the four religious tenets of the Soka Gakkai. They are:

1. This Association shall regard Nichiren Daishonin as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.
2. It shall embrace with faith the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws

bestowed upon the entire world,

3. It shall base itself on Nichiren Daishonin's writings,
4. it shall seek to realise, as its ultimate goal, the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, thus fulfilling the Daishonin's mandate.

Article 3

The Spirit of the Soka Gakkai, which is entirely new, says: The Three Successive Presidents - first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, second president Josei Toda and third president Daisaku Ikeda - embody the spirit of selfless devotion to spreading the Law for the attainment of kosen-rufu, and shall be considered as eternal leaders of this Association.

Article 4

Objectives of the Soka Gakkai: The objectives of this association shall be to propagate Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism throughout the world, and to contribute to the realisation of world peace and flourishing of human culture based upon this foundation, by spreading its teachings, conducting ceremonies and functions, helping its members to deepen and establish faith, all based upon Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

The following article, written by Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito on 29 March 2002, was published in the November 2004 issue of the SGI-UK study magazine Art of Living, pp. 23-24. In it, the significance of the above changes are made clear.

The principal tenet (conviction) of the Soka Gakkai is to practise faith directly connected to Nichiren Daishonin

Article 2 of the recently revised Rules and Regulations articulates the four religious tenets of the Soka Gakkai. It reads:

This Association shall regard Nichiren Daishonin as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. It shall embrace with faith the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws bestowed upon the entire world, base itself on Nichiren Daishonin's writings, and seek to realise, as its ultimate goal, the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, thus fulfilling the Daishonin's mandate.

This statement summarises in four points the 'faith directly connected to Nichiren Daishonin' that the Soka Gakkai has maintained since its founding.

The First Tenet

First it says, 'This Association shall regard Nichiren Daishonin as the True Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.' In the Goshō, the Daishonin states:

If Nichiren's compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myōhō-rengyō will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering.^[1]

In order to save the age of the Latter Day of the Law, which is described as a time of 'quarrels and disputes in which Shakyamuni's teachings will be lost', and lead the people

to happiness on the most fundamental level, the Daishonin revealed and propagated Nam-myoho-renge-kyo which is the core and essence of the Lotus Sutra and the fundamental Law of life itself. To revere the Daishonin as the True Buddha who embodies the three virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent to all people of this age is the foundation of the faith of the Soka Gakkai.

The Second Tenet

Second, Article 2 then says, ‘This Association shall embrace with faith the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws bestowed upon the entire world.’ This addresses the essential significance of faith in the Dai-Gohonzon, which the Soka Gakkai has consistently maintained.

During the Atsuhara persecution, ordinary believers demonstrated the spirit to persevere in faith even when their very lives were threatened. In response to this, Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon, thereby fulfilling the purpose of his advent in this world, on the 12th October 1279.

To reply to the spirit of the people, who had aroused genuine and devout faith of yearning for peace and happiness, and to lead all people of the Latter Day of the Law to happiness, the Daishonin revealed the purpose of his advent in the form of the Dai-Gohonzon, in which he embodied his great vow to realise kosen-rufu, and establish a Buddha land. Accordingly, the faith of the Soka Gakkai lies in arousing a great desire, or great vow, for kosen-rufu in perfect accord with the Daishonin’s own spirit; it is the strong faith to advance and practise for the happiness of ordinary people.

The Gohonzon, which is one with the very life of the Daishonin, becomes manifest only in the strong faith to wage a resolute struggle for kosen-rufu with the aim of defeating and destroying devilish functions. Therefore, it is called the ‘object of devotion for observing the mind’. The strong faith of the Soka Gakkai is indicated by the phrase ‘embrace with faith the Dai-Gohonzon’. In ‘Article 2’ the phrase ‘bestowed upon the entire world’ addresses the Daishonin’s spirit, embodied in the Dai-Gohonzon, to lead to happiness all people of Jambudvipa - indicating the entire world - over the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law. This is the fundamental significance underlying the Dai-Gohonzon.

Thus, the Daishonin says:

Showing profound compassion for those unable to comprehend the gem of the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the Buddha wrapped it within the five characters [of Myoho-renge-kyo], with which he then adorned the necks of the ignorant people of the latter age.^[2]

Based on the concept of ‘emanations of the Buddha’s body’, to embrace a Gohonzon that is a transcription of the Dai-Gohonzon with correct faith, is to embrace the Dai-Gohonzon.

[‘Emanations of the Buddha’s body’ is a principle based on the Lotus Sutra and the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra. It refers to the Buddha projecting emanations of his body in various lands, and teaching the same Law to the people in those lands through his emanations. Through the power of their faith, the beings in those lands are able to receive precisely the same benefit’.]

Accordingly, to embrace the Gohonzon that is enshrined in our own home is to embrace the Dai-Gohonzon.

The argument of the Nikken Sect that one must visit some specific place in order to attain Buddhahood is erroneous and does not accord with the Daishonin’s intent. This is as indicated by the following Goshō passages:

...the place where one upholds the Lotus Sutra is itself the place of practice; it is not to be found by leaving this place and going elsewhere.[3]

And,

Wherever we dwell and practise the single vehicle, that place will be the Capital of Eternally Tranquil Light.[4]

Next, we come to the Three Great Secret Laws. In order to guide the people of the Latter Day to happiness and transform the age, Nichiren Daishonin expressed the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo from time without beginning that he himself practised in a form that corresponds to the three types of learning: precepts, meditation and wisdom. He termed this doctrine the Three Great Secret Laws, which consists of the object of devotion of the essential teaching (meditation), the daimoku of the essential teaching (wisdom) and the high sanctuary of the essential teaching (precepts).

Through his teaching of the Three Great Secret Laws, the Daishonin enabled the people of the Latter Day of the Law to take faith in and practise the Mystic Law. In other words, the term 'Three Great Secret Laws' here indicates the Gohonzon as the embodiment of the correct teaching of the Latter Day of the Law, whose power is available to all.

The Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon in order to lead all people to happiness. When people embrace with faith the Gohonzon, which is the correct teaching for the Latter Day, they can cause the same state of life of the world of Buddhahood as the Daishonin possessed to manifest in their own lives.

In the Gosho, the Daishonin says:

Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of devotion in all of Jambudvipa. Be sure to strengthen your faith, and receive the protection of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions.[5]

And,

I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi ink, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart. The Buddha's will is the Lotus Sutra, but the soul of Nichiren is nothing other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.[6]

As these passages suggest, faith based upon the Gohonzon is the way of faith revealed and taught by the Daishonin himself. Since its founding, the Soka Gakkai has persevered in carrying out faith based on the Gohonzon exactly as the Daishonin taught.

The Third Tenet

Third, the statement, 'This Association shall base itself on Nichiren Daishonin's writings' indicates the manner of practising based on the Gosho that is the tradition of the Soka Gakkai. The Gosho is the True Buddha's teaching related to matters of both doctrine and practice; it could be described as the great scripture for the Latter Day. The Gosho is the Soka Gakkai's eternal standard.

The Fourth Tenet

Fourth, this article says that this Association will 'seek to realise, as its ultimate goal, the worldwide propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, thus fulfilling the Daishonin's mandate'. This applies to the great wish for kosen-rufu that is the heart of the Soka Gakkai spirit.

The Daishonin teaches that 'the heritage of faith' of the ultimate law of life and death

flows in an organisation whose members possess the great wish for kosen-rufu and are united by the faith of many in body, one in mind.

He also explains that the path to attaining Buddhahood lies exclusively in the practice for kosen-rufu, which entails spreading the Mystic Law to one person after another. The great wish for kosen-rufu is the heart and soul of the legitimate body that is dedicated to transmitting Buddhism.

Published in the November 2004 issue of the SGI-UK study magazine *Art of Living*, [pp. 24-26].

^[1] Nichiren Daishonin, 'On Repaying Debts of Gratitude', (WND, p. 736).

^[2] Nichiren Daishonin, 'The Object of Worship for Observing the Mind', (WND, p. 376).

^[3] Nichiren Daishonin, *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 781.

^[4] Nichiren Daishonin, 'Reply to Sairen-bo', (WND, p. 313).

^[5] Nichiren Daishonin, 'The True Aspect of all Phenomena', (WND, p. 386).

^[6] Nichiren Daishonin, 'Reply to Kyo'o', (WND, p. 412).

SECTION C. BASICS OF BUDDHISM

1. CHANGING POISON INTO MEDICINE (Extract From SGI Newsletter No. No. 5462: The World of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings, No. 13)

“Changing poison into medicine”: The principle that earthly desires and sufferings can be transformed into benefit and enlightenment by virtue of the power of the Law. This phrase is found in a passage from Nagaruna’s Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom, which describes “a great physician who can change poison into medicine.” The allegory of a “great physician” is used because the Lotus Sutra opens the possibility of attaining Buddhahood to persons of the two vehicles—voice-hearers and cause-awakened ones—who were denied this in other sutras.

The Daishonin writes: “Bodhisattva Nagarjuna, interpreting the character ‘myo’ of myoho (Mystic Law), says that [the Lotus Sutra] is like a great physician who can change poison into medicine. Changing poison into medicine means changing the three paths of earthly desires, karma, and suffering into the three virtues of the Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation” (GZ, 984).

2. PRACTICE FOR ONESELF AND OTHERS (Extract From SGI Newsletter No. 7109)

The Daishonin writes: “You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others” (WND, 386). In addition to striving in faith ourselves, he says, we must also help others do the same. Basically, it is by working for kosen-rufu out of our desire for the happiness of others that we ourselves become truly happy. This is the fusion of practice for self and practice for others. Our own sufferings become the driving force for the ultimate bodhisattva practice that is kosen-rufu.

As we do our best for the welfare of others, we break out of our narrow lesser self that is focused only on personal concerns, and gradually expand and elevate our life-state. The commitment to others’ well-being is what propels us to transform our life-state and carry out our human revolution.

The lives of Gakkai members, who pray wholeheartedly for the happiness of their friends and earnestly share the Daishonin’s teachings with others, brim with joy, courage, and hope. Though we may be struggling with various health, financial, or other problems, we can overcome them confidently, like an accomplished surfer riding a big wave.

The true great benefit of faith is this fundamental inner transformation and human revolution. According to the principle of the oneness of life and its environment, when our life-state changes we are able to change our environment as well, and thereby solve all of our problems and struggles.

3. FUNDAMENTAL DARKNESS (Extract from SGI Newsletter No. 7450: SGI President Ikeda’s Study Lecture Series, Learning from the Gosho: the Hope-filled Writings of Nichiren Daishonin [3] “Reply to Sairen-bo”

Fundamental darkness refers to fundamental ignorance of the Law, which manifests as disbelieving, doubting, and disrespecting the Law. This darkness or negativity is activated in our lives when our faith becomes clouded, our practice weakens, and we cease to feel the power of the Buddha and power of the Law—on account of such things, for example, as becoming attached to erroneous teachings or obsessed with a selfish desire for fame and fortune.

The Daishonin interprets fundamental darkness as ignorance of the fact that one's life is essentially a manifestation of the Law, which he identifies as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

4. CASTING OFF THE TRANSIENT AND REVEALING THE TRUE (Adapted from SGI Newsletter 2374 SGI President Ikeda's Lectures on the "Hoben" (Expedient Means) and "Juryo" (Life Span of the Thus Come One) Chapters of the Lotus Sutra No. 20

Casting off the transient and revealing the true": The revealing of a Buddha's true status as a Buddha, and the setting aside of that Buddha's provisional or transient identity. Nichiren Daishonin actualized the principle of "casting off the transient and revealing the true" at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, which took place on the 12TH September, 1271. The Daishonin's "casting off the transient and revealing the true" should not be seen as putting him on a level inaccessible to ordinary people. What the Daishonin in fact revealed at Tatsunokuchi is the supreme path of human conduct.

The essence of Buddhism lies in the principle of ordinary people in their present form manifesting the supremely noble state of Buddhahood. The life of kuon ganjo can be manifested in the entity of the life of a common mortal. This is what the Daishonin taught by his own example through "casting off the transient and revealing the true."

When all members stand up with the realization that they are children of the Buddha who have a direct connection with Nichiren Daishonin, the SGI will, as an organization, actualize the principle of "casting off the transient and revealing the true."

The day of "casting off the transient and revealing the true" for the Soka Gakkai was May 3, 1951, when Josei Toda became the second Soka Gakkai president.

Around that day, President Toda said many times, "Looking back, from around the spring of 1943, President Makiguchi was always saying that the Soka Gakkai 'has to cast off the transient and reveal the true.' Unless we actualized the principle of 'casting off the transient and revealing the true,' he said, something was wrong with us. Everyone just stood around perplexed, not knowing what to do."

In the end, Mr. Toda carried out President Makiguchi's spirit. The bond of mentor and disciple is the key to "casting off the transient and revealing the true."

Whenever we find ourselves in a deadlock, we need to challenge ourselves to offer sincere prayer and summon forth great power of faith to resolve the situation. According to President Toda, this is what "casting off the transient and revealing the true" means for us. Faith means to struggle against deadlock. Faith is a struggle between the devil and the Buddha. In Buddhism, victory or defeat is the prime concern.

He says, "moment by moment we reveal the true." When we exert ourselves in chanting daimoku and carrying out activities for kosen-rufu, our true self - the Buddha of limitless joy - appears in our lives; our wisdom is activated; courage wells forth; and we can enjoy a state of life of total freedom. This is what "casting off the transient and revealing the true" means for us.

5. THREE OBSTACLES AND FOUR DEVILS

Three obstacles and four devils: Various obstacles and hindrances to the practice of Buddhism. They are listed in the Nirvana Sutra and Nagarjuna's 'The Treatise on the Great Perfection

of Wisdom'. The three obstacles are (1) the obstacle of earthly desires, or obstacles arising from the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness; (2) the obstacle of karma, obstacles due to bad karma created by committing any of the five cardinal sins or ten evil acts; and (3) the obstacle of retribution, obstacles caused by the negative karmic effects of actions in the three evil paths. The four devils are (1) the hindrance of the five components, obstructions caused by one's physical and mental functions; (2) the hindrance of earthly desires, obstructions arising from the three poisons; (3) the hindrance of death, meaning one's own untimely death obstructing one's practice of Buddhism, or the premature death of another practitioner causing one to doubt; and (4) the hindrance of the devil king, who is said to assume various forms or take possession of others in order to cause one to discard one's Buddhist practice. This hindrance is regarded as the most difficult to overcome.

6. BODHISATTVAS OF THE EARTH (Adapted from SGI Newsletter No. 7055)

Bodhisattvas who are Shakyamuni's disciples from the remote past, whom Shakyamuni, in the "Emerging from the Earth" (15th) chapter, calls forth as the ones to whom he will entrust propagation of the Mystic Law after his death. They are called Bodhisattvas of the Earth because they are described as emerging from the ground. Their leader is named Superior Practices.

After they appear, Shakyamuni proclaims to the assembly: "Ever since the long distant past "I have been teaching and converting this multitude" (LS15, 220). With the appearance of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who are the disciples of the essential teaching, Shakyamuni goes on to disclose his true life span and the fact that he actually attained enlightenment in the remote past.

In one of his well-known writings "The True Aspect of All Phenomena," the Daishonin clearly states:

If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. And if you are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt that you have been a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha from the remote past. . . . There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku. (WND-1, 385)

It is precisely all of you who chant the Mystic Law and take action for kosen-rufu—the Daishonin's will and decree—who are these Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The daimoku we chant is not just simply for our own security and protection, but daimoku for achieving kosen-rufu—the true peace and happiness for all people—and for combating evil and injustice. Ultimately, no matter how much daimoku we may chant, unless we take concrete action—actively fighting against the three obstacles and four devils and refuting slander and abuse directed at us as votaries of the Lotus Sutra—we will not be able to gain enlightenment. As the Daishonin says: "To hope to attain Buddhahood without speaking out against slander is as futile as trying to find water in the midst of fire or fire in the midst of water" (WND-1, 747).

Section D: 'The Dragon Gate' (WND-1, pp. 1002-1003)

Extracts from SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's recent lecture taken from SGI Newsletter No. 7536, 30 April 2008 which highlight key passages from this work

'My wish is that all my disciples make a great vow' - carrying on the great vow for the happiness of all humanity

In this profoundly significant month in which we celebrate the anniversary of 16 March Kosen-rufu Day¹ - a day of passing the baton from mentor to disciples - I would like to study the Daishonin's writing 'The Dragon Gate' to delve into the deep meaning of this life-to-life transmission. This is a fervent letter that the Daishonin sent to Nanjo Tokimitsu,² who was then a 21-year-old youth struggling to protect his fellow believers amid the intense pressures of the Atsuhara Persecution.³

In this letter, the Daishonin proclaims: 'My wish is that all my disciples make a great vow.' (WND-1, p. 1002) This 'great vow' is the great vow of the Buddha - which is ultimately the great vow for kosen-rufu... In his personal copy of the Daishonin's writings, first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi double-underlined the passage, 'Here I will make a great vow', and also wrote 'great vow' in large characters in the margin next to it. He lived out his life true to this great vow, never succumbing to the persecution of Japan's militarist authorities.

Mr Toda also declared: 'No matter what enormous hardships might arise, I will never forsake the great vow for kosen-rufu... I will do what I have to do - that is, strive to save the poor and the sick and those who are suffering. For that purpose, I will keep speaking out with all my might.'⁴

In my youth, I stood up alone as Mr Toda's loyal disciple and did everything I could to support and assist him. In the course of those struggles, I inherited this great vow from my mentor. The great vow for kosen-rufu is inherited only through the joint struggle of mentor and disciple.

My spirit of waging a shared struggle with my mentor has continued to this very day. There has never been a day when Mr Toda was absent from my heart. I have lived my life these past fifty years with a vow and commitment as if each day were 16 March. My keenest wish now, the area where I am challenging myself most, is to enable all people, particularly young people, to savour and shine with the deep and abiding joy that comes from dedicating one's life to the great vow for kosen-rufu. I wish this especially for the youth, since it is to them whom we must entrust the future.

In 'The Dragon Gate'... the Daishonin is making an ardent appeal for his young disciple to arouse a great vow for kosen-rufu and carry on his struggle. Let us learn from this writing, which can be taken as a source of inspiration for the spirit of 16 March, Kosen-rufu Day.

A waterfall called the Dragon Gate exists in China. Its waters plunge a hundred feet, swifter than an arrow shot by a strong warrior. It is said that a great many carp gather in the basin below, hoping to climb the falls, and that any that succeeds will turn into a dragon. Not a single carp, however, out of a hundred, a thousand or even ten thousand, can climb the falls, not even after ten or twenty years. Some are swept away by the strong currents, some fall prey to eagles, hawks, kites and owls, and others are netted, scooped up, or even shot with arrows by fishermen who line both banks of the falls ten cho wide. Such is the difficulty a carp faces in becoming a dragon...

Attaining Buddhahood is no easier than for men of low status to enter court circles, or for carp to climb the Dragon Gate. (WND-1, p. 1002)

Buddhahood is attained through surmounting difficulties

This letter was written at the very height of the Atsuhara Persecution. At great personal risk, the 21-year-old Tokimitsu bravely protected his fellow practitioners, offering a number of them shelter in his own home. This led to his being targeted by the authorities in various ways. A short time later, they unjustly levied heavy taxes against him.

In this letter, the Daishonin emphasises that attaining Buddhahood entails overcoming many hurdles and difficulties. To make his point, he draws analogies from the ancient Chinese tale of the Dragon Gate waterfall ...[T]he Daishonin highlights for Tokimitsu that remaining steadfast in one's Buddhist practice to the very end is an undertaking fraught with as many difficulties as a carp faces in climbing the Dragon Gate and turning into a dragon. The strong currents of the waterfall that drive the fish back can be likened to the conditions of an evil age defiled by the five impurities⁵ as described in the Lotus Sutra; while the birds of prey and fishermen can be likened to the three obstacles and four devils⁶ and the three powerful enemies⁷ that hinder one's efforts to attain Buddhahood.

Persevering in faith in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law is like swimming upstream against a powerful current. It is hard enough just to resist the insidious forces exerted by our own earthly desires⁸ and fundamental darkness.⁹ Shakyamuni compared these forces to a strong current or flood.¹⁰ The Daishonin explains that this is even truer in the Latter Day, when even seemingly remarkable human wisdom, ingenuity or know-how can be inundated by an inexorable tide of deluded impulses fuelled by the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness - an ever-growing tide that wreaks havoc as a force of evil. (WND-1, p. 1121)¹¹

Precisely because it is so difficult to carry out faith in the Mystic Law in such an age, the bonds of mentor and disciple in Buddhism take on a decisive importance. Likewise, a harmonious community of fellow practitioners solidly united in purpose -in what the Daishonin terms as 'the spirit of many in body, one in mind' - is also indispensable. The Soka Gakkai possesses the bonds of mentor and disciple that are strong enough to withstand any adversity. And its members - noble ordinary people who are polishing their lives by striving in faith with the same commitment as their mentor - are allied together in solid unity. Moreover, countless members, like magnificent dragons born through the triumphant ascent of the waterfall, are leading lives of profound dignity and confidence forged through continually challenging themselves in their faith and self-development.

President Makiguchi's efforts to provide personal encouragement

In 1939, Mr Makiguchi made his first visit to the city of Yame in Fukuoka Prefecture, Kyushu (the southernmost of Japan's four main islands), for the purpose of sharing the Daishonin's Buddhism with others. During that trip, he also spoke about the Daishonin's writing 'Climbing Up Dragon Gate'. (WND-2, p. 673) Talking to a woman who had just decided to follow her husband in becoming a Soka Gakkai member, Mr Makiguchi said: 'You must overcome various hardships and become a splendidly capable person. No matter what might happen, never abandon your faith.'

Mr Makiguchi travelled to Yame again the following year, and again the year after that, holding discussion meetings there. He would go anywhere if it would help even one person or youth. .. When Mr Makiguchi set out for one destination, he would never just stop there. Instead, he would eagerly make his way from there to a new area, seeking to enable people to form a connection with Buddhism and to find new capable people for kosen-rufu...

The 'great vow' of Buddhism can only be actualised through the persistent challenge of going out into society and earnestly seeking to do whatever we can to inspire and encourage each person we encounter, leaving no stone unturned, so to speak. That is why both Mr Makiguchi and Mr Toda placed such great importance on one-on-one dialogue and discussion meetings. To continue reaching out in dialogue to the person right in front of us and conveying through our spirit and lives the greatness of the Mystic Law, which is the key to genuine happiness - that is the way to truly fulfil the great vow for kosen-rufu.

Shariputra, for example, practised bodhisattva austerities for sixty kalpas in order to attain Buddhahood, but finally could persevere no longer and slipped back into the paths of the two vehicles. Even some of those who formed ties with the Lotus Sutra in the days of the Buddha Great Universal Wisdom Excellence sank into the sufferings of birth and death for the duration of major world system dust particle kalpas. Some others who received the seeds of Buddhahood in the even more remote past suffered for the length of numberless major world system dust particle kalpas. All these people practised the Lotus Sutra, but when harassed in one way or another by the devil king of the sixth heaven, who had taken possession of their rulers and other authorities, they backslid and forsook their faith, and thus wandered among the six paths for countless kalpas. (WND-1, p. 1002-1003)

Be wary of negative influences, or 'evil friends'

Next, using examples from the sutras, the Daishonin mentions the difficulty of continuing one's Buddhist practice. The point stressed here is the fearful nature of negative influences, or what Buddhism refers to as 'evil friends'.¹⁴

In a past existence, Shariputra, despite being an advanced practitioner who had endured countless austerities, regressed in faith because he allowed himself to be swayed by such an external influence. In his case, he was influenced by a Brahman who begged for his eye and then trampled on it. As a result, Shariputra decided that people such as this were too

difficult to save and gave up his desire to follow the bodhisattva way.

Such negative influences, or evil friends, are essentially the workings of the devil king of the sixth heaven.¹⁵ The reality of the devil king is the fundamental darkness that is inherent in our lives and those of others.

Here, the devil king, manifesting in the form of the eye-begging Brahman, succeeded in swaying Shariputra's mind. The Daishonin also spoke of the devil king taking possession of rulers and other authorities and causing various practitioners of the Lotus Sutra to regress and abandon their faith. Even those who had formed direct ties to the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni in the remote past sank into the sufferings of birth and death for the staggeringly long duration of major world system dust particle kalpas or numberless major world system dust particle kalpas due to having been led astray by this devil. (See WND-1, p. 1003)

The Daishonin had long been warning Tokimitsu about the fearfulness of negative influences, or evil friends. Explaining, for example, that evil friends may approach in the form of allies, he instructed his young disciple to summon strong faith when they appeared in his environment. By doing so, he says, the heavenly deities, or the positive functions in the universe, would surely lend their protection.¹⁶

Until recently these events seemed to have had no bearing on us, but now we find ourselves facing the same kind of ordeal. My wish is that all my disciples make a great vow. We are very fortunate to be alive after the widespread epidemics that occurred last year and the year before. But now with the impending Mongol invasion it appears that few will survive. In the end, no one can escape death. The sufferings at that time will be exactly like what we are experiencing now. Since death is the same in either case, you should be willing to offer your life for the Lotus Sutra. Think of this offering as a drop of dew rejoining the ocean, or a speck of dust returning to the earth. A passage from the third volume of the Lotus Sutra reads, 'We beg that the merit gained through these gifts may be spread far and wide to everyone, so that we and other living beings all together may attain the Buddha way.' [LS7, p. 130].

With my deep respect,
Nichiren

The sixth day of the eleventh month

Reply to Ueno the Worthy

I write this letter in deep gratitude for your dedication throughout the events at Atsuhara.
(WND-1, p. 1003)

The great vow: our foundation in an age of confusion

The Daishonin writes: ‘Until recently these events seemed to have had no bearing on us, but now we find ourselves facing the same kind of ordeal.’ (WND-1, p. 1003). Needless to say, he is alluding to the Atsuhara Persecution.

The only way to repel this fierce attack of the devil king is to base one’s life on ‘a great vow’. (WND-1, p. 1003) We cannot bring forth the strength to withstand great hardships or persecution for the sake of the Lotus Sutra unless we make our ultimate goal the attainment of Buddhahood in this lifetime and dedicate our lives to the great vow of the Buddha for the realisation of kosen-rufu. Therefore, the Daishonin calls out from the depths of his being: ‘My wish is that all my disciples make a great vow.’ (WND-1, p. 1003) A life based on a great vow is truly profound and unshakeable.

Next, the Daishonin states: ‘No one can escape death.’ (WND-1, p. 1003) In another writing, the Daishonin describes the terrible toll these epidemics had taken: ‘People die like trees toppling before a great wind or plants flattened by a severe snowfall.’ (WND-2, p. 802)

The inexorable reality of death must have been deeply impressed on the minds of the people of the day. Therefore, the Daishonin writes: ‘In the end, no one can escape death. The sufferings at that time will be exactly like what we are experiencing now. Since death is the same in either case, you should be willing to offer your life for the Lotus Sutra.’ (WND-1, p. 1003)

The Atsuhara Persecution led to the execution of three of the Daishonin’s farmer disciples who are known as the ‘three martyrs of Atsuhara’.¹⁷ There are two theories about when their execution happened. One states that it occurred on 15 October 1279, just before this letter was written (in November 1279). Another holds that it took place in April 1280, the following year. If we take the former view as being correct, then the words, ‘Since death is the same in either case, you should be willing to offer your life for the Lotus Sutra’, can be read as an indication that their deaths had profound significance in terms of Buddhism and as praise of their just and courageous struggles. Of course, it is not the Daishonin’s intention to glorify death. He is praising strong faith that does not waver even in the face of death.

Why, then, should there be no cause for regret in laying down one’s life for the Lotus Sutra? Regarding this, the Daishonin says: ‘Think of this offering as a drop of dew rejoining the ocean, or a speck of dust returning to the earth.’ (WND-1, p. 1003) From the standpoint of eternity, our present existence is as fleeting as dew. And, compared to the colossal scale of the universe, our lives are as tiny as specks of dust. However, by solidly basing our lives on the Mystic Law - which is as vast as the ocean and as firm as the earth - we can establish an unshakeable and boundless state of life that is at one with that all-encompassing Law. This is the Daishonin’s message.

In another writing, he also states: ‘Like the dew merging with the great ocean or soil added to the great earth, [the benefit of this offering] will remain in lifetime after lifetime, and never abate for existence after existence.’ (WND-2, p. 532) Dew by merging with the ocean, and dust by returning to the earth, continue and live on eternally, in a manner of speaking. In the same way, our lives, as people dedicated to realising kosen-rufu, will merge into the Buddhahood in the universe, and eternally repeat the cycle of birth and death in that indestructible realm. Moreover, we will always be reborn to fulfil the supreme mission of kosen-rufu in the place and circumstances of our choosing. In that sense, we can interpret

the Daishonin's call to 'make a great vow' to mean 'enter an eternal and unsurpassed way of being'.

Living for the happiness of oneself and others

This great vow to strive for and realise the happiness of ourselves and others - both in this lifetime and eternally throughout all future existences - is the essence of Mahayana Buddhism.

From our standpoint as practitioners of the Daishonin's Buddhism, the great vow means dedicating our lives to kosen-rufu. A teacher or mentor sets forth and demonstrates this noble way of life, while genuine disciples emulate that example.

We have now entered an age when Bodhisattvas of the Earth awakened to the Daishonin's Buddhism are standing up all over the world and striving for kosen-rufu with solid unity of purpose. Our movement constitutes an alliance of Bodhisattvas of the Earth who share the same great vow. The young people who will shoulder the second act of kosen-rufu have stood up in communities everywhere. I entrust everything to you! The future is in your hands!

(Endnotes)

1 On 16 March 1958, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda entrusted the future of kosen-rufu to President Ikeda and the members of the youth division. This date is commemorated annually in the Soka Gakkai as Kosen-rufu Day.

2 Nanjo Tokimitsu (1259-1332): A staunch follower of the Daishonin and the steward of Ueno Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province (part of present-day Shizuoka Prefecture). During the Atsuhara Persecution, he used his influence to protect his fellow practitioners, sheltering some in his home.

3 Atsuhara Persecution: A series of threats and acts of violence against followers of Nichiren Daishonin in Atsuhara Village in Fuji District, beginning around 1275 and continuing until around 1283. A pivotal event took place on 21 September 1279, when twenty of the Daishonin's farmer believers were arrested on false charges and sent for trial to Kamakura. There, the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, Hei no Saemon, tried to force them to recant their faith. They refused, and three of them were subsequently beheaded.

4 Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei Zenshu (Collected Writings of Josei Toda)* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1989), vol. 4, pp. 61-62.

5 Five impurities: The impurities of the age, of desire, of living beings, of view, and of life span. They are mentioned in the 'Expedient Means' (second) chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

6 Three obstacles and four devils: Various obstacles and hindrances to the practice of Buddhism. The three obstacles are: 1) the obstacle of earthly desires; 2) the obstacle of karma; and 3) the obstacle of retribution. The four devils are: 1) the hindrance of the five components; 2) the hindrance of earthly desires; 3) the hindrance of death; and 4) the hindrance of the devil king.

7 Three powerful enemies: Three types of arrogant people who persecute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after Shakyamuni Buddha's death, described in a twenty-line verse section of the 'Encouraging Devotion' (thirteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China summarises them as arrogant lay people, arrogant priests and arrogant false sages.

8 Earthly desires: Also, illusions, defilements, impurities, earthly passions or simply desires. A generic term for all the workings of life that cause one psychological and physical suffering and impede the quest for enlightenment, including desires and illusions in the general sense. Earthly desires are also referred to as fetters or bonds (Skt samyojana or bandhana), because they bind people to the realm of delusion and suffering. Buddhism regards them as the fundamental cause for affliction and suffering. The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom by Nagarjuna says that the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness are the most fundamental earthly desires and give rise to all others.

9 Fundamental darkness: Also, fundamental ignorance or primal ignorance. The most deeply rooted illusion inherent in life, said to give rise to all other illusions. Darkness in this sense means inability to see or recognise the truth, particularly, that the Buddha nature is inherent in one's life.

10 The Buddha states to the effect that people who give up craving, people whose hearts are free of taints, be called people who have crossed the strong current or flood of earthly desires. [See The Group of Discourses (Sutta-nipata), translated by K. R. Norman (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1995), vol. 2, p. 122 (No. 1082); cf. Buddha no Kotoba—Suttanipata (Words of the Buddha - Sutta-nipata), translated by Hajime Nakamura (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1994), p. 228.]

11 The Daishonin writes: 'Thus, the extremity of greed, anger and foolishness in people's hearts in the impure world of the latter age makes it difficult for any worthy or sage to control. This is because, though the Buddha cured greed with the medicine of the meditation on the vileness of the body, healed anger with the meditation on compassion for all, and treated foolishness with the meditation on the twelve-linked chain of causation, teaching these doctrines now makes people worse and compounds their greed, anger, and foolishness. For example, fire is extinguished by water, and evil is defeated by good. In contrast, however, if water is poured on fire that has emerged from water, it would be as if one had poured oil, producing an even greater conflagration.' (WND-1, p. 1121)

12 Kalpa: (Skt) An extremely long period of time. Sutras and treatises differ in their definitions, but kalpas fall into two major categories, those of measurable and immeasurable duration. There are three kinds of measurable kalpas: small, medium, and major. One explanation sets the length of a small kalpa at approximately sixteen million years.

13 This story is found in The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom. Once, when Shariputra was engaged in offering alms as part of his bodhisattva practice in a previous existence, a Brahman begged him for his eye. Shariputra gave it to him, but the Brahman was so revolted by its smell that he dropped it on the ground and trampled on it. Seeing this, Shariputra discontinued his bodhisattva practice, retreating into the Hinayana teachings, or the way of voice-hearers, and failed to attain Buddhahood.

14 Evil friends: Also, evil companion or evil teacher. One who causes others to fall into the evil paths by misleading them in connection with Buddhism. Evil friends refer to those who influence or approach other people with the intention of leading them away from correct Buddhist practice and to an erroneous teaching.

15 Devil king of the sixth heaven: Also, devil king or heavenly devil. The king of devils, who dwells in the highest or the sixth heaven of the world of desire. He is also named Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others, the king who makes free use of the fruits of others' efforts for his own pleasure. Served by innumerable minions, he obstructs Buddhist practice and delights in sapping the life force of other beings.

16 In 'The Source of Aniruddha's Good Fortune', the Daishonin writes: 'When those who are vital to your interests [that is, people who are important to you] try to prevent you from upholding your faith, or you are faced with great obstacles, you must believe that [Buddhist gods such as] king Brahma and others will without fail fulfill their vow [to protect the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra], and strengthen your faith more than ever...If people try to hinder your faith, I urge you strongly to feel joy.' (WND-2, p. 566)

17 The Atsuhara Persecution culminated with Hei no Saemon, the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs, ordering the execution of three of the Daishonin's followers - the brothers Jinshiro, Yagoro, and Yarokuro - who steadfastly refused to recant their faith. They are known as the 'three martyrs of Atsuhara'.

Section E: Priesthood Issue

Material from Living Buddhism March/April issue p.31 USA) based on an article in the October 2007 issue of The Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal).

The Errors of the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood

Introduction

This article presents a brief overview of the nature of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood under an administration that insists upon belief in the absolute authority and infallibility of its high priest. Nikken Abe, the 67th high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, asserted this doctrine to bolster his own authority, which had been challenged by priests within Nichiren Shoshu. Ultimately, Nikken used this doctrine to justify his actions aimed at disbanding the Soka Gakkai, discrediting SGI President Ikeda and establishing himself as the absolute and unquestioned religious authority in believers' lives.

Rifts between Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai

First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and his closest disciple, Josei Toda, were introduced to Nichiren Buddhism in 1928 through a member of Nichiren Shoshu. From the outset, they earnestly studied, embraced and spread the teachings and practice based on their belief that Buddhism as taught by Nichiren Daishonin is the most direct way to help people rise above their suffering and establish absolute happiness in their lives.

In the 1940s, trying to unite the country around its war policies, the Japanese military government was pressurising religious groups to infuse worship of the State religion, Shinto, into their beliefs. Mr Makiguchi opposed these efforts.

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, however, implemented policies and doctrines that held Nichiren Buddhism to be subordinate to State Shinto. The priesthood encouraged its followers, including Mr Makiguchi, Mr Toda and the members of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (the precursor to the Soka Gakkai), to accept the Shinto talisman.

Mr Makiguchi and Mr Toda refused to accept the talisman and protested to the Nichiren Shoshu high priest that such action represented a compromise of Nichiren Daishonin's intent and amounted to the destruction of his teachings. While the priests chose to appease the authorities, Mr Makiguchi and Mr Toda adopted the stance of Nichiren Daishonin himself, speaking out against the government's efforts to degrade the correct teachings of Buddhism.

Later, authorities imprisoned both Soka Gakkai leaders for their stance against government policies. President Makiguchi died in prison a martyr to his beliefs, and Josei Toda emerged from prison determined to continue his mentor's work of spreading Nichiren Buddhism. He immediately began rebuilding the Soka Gakkai.

Despite the fundamental differences between the Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu regarding State Shinto, the Soka Gakkai, as it had done since its founding prior to the war, worked to protect and help develop Nichiren Shoshu. Even while experiencing financial difficulties, the Soka Gakkai continued to build and donate temples to Nichiren Shoshu, eventually donating more than 350 temples. In addition, it revitalised the poverty-stricken Nichiren Shoshu head temple, Taiseki-ji, and donated many structures, including the Sho Hondo, or Grand Main Temple, which was dedicated as the sanctuary of the essential teaching of Nichiren Buddhism to last for thousands of years. Eventually, Nikken demolished this

structure that had been built through the sincere donations of millions of believers.

The Soka Gakkai also encouraged its members to visit and support their local temples as well as the head temple.

At times, there were apparent disparities between the aims of the Soka Gakkai - whose fundamental goal has always been to realise the global spread of Nichiren Buddhism - and Nichiren Shoshu, which has been focused on ceremony, ritual and maintaining the authority of the priests.

[The late sociologist of religion Dr Bryan Wilson from Oxford University noted the nature of the relationship that developed between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood: 'The priesthood was a conservative body, small, secluded and with horizons narrowly circumscribed by centuries of Japanese insulation from the external world. Soka Gakkai was a movement of revitalisation, adapted to modern conditions, pursuing from the outset a policy of expansive growth, and quickly acquiring an international clientele and orientation. The priesthood was characteristically authoritarian, status conscious, and hierarchic; the lay organisation was populist, egalitarian, and unwilling to concede the sort of status differences which were endemic in conceptions of priesthood. The history of the schism - which can be only lightly adumbrated here - illustrates precisely these underlying dispositions.](A Time to Chant p233)

On such occasions, the Soka Gakkai worked to overcome these problems, desiring harmonious relations between the two bodies.

In 1990, however, Nikken began a course of one-sided measures against the Soka Gakkai. These actions revealed his true nature, which was characterised by complete disrespect towards lay believers. Nikken had formulated a plot he called 'Operation C' ('C' for 'cut'), intended to cut relations with the Soka Gakkai - the organisation of lay believers - and to cut the bond that exists between the lay believers and SGI President Ikeda and cause those believers to fall directly under the priesthood's authority. They aimed to ensure that Nikken and the priesthood exclusively receive all donations made by the laity.

In December 1990, Nichiren Shoshu rewrote its guidelines as a religious body in order to allow for the dismissal of SGI President Ikeda and other top leaders of the Soka Gakkai from their roles as representative leaders of all Nichiren Shoshu lay organisations. With the specific intent of creating shock and discord among the membership, prior to informing the Soka Gakkai of this decision, the priesthood publicly announced its action through the tabloid media.

The Soka Gakkai immediately sought to resolve the situation through dialogue with the priesthood, but Nichiren Shoshu refused to discuss the matter. Before long, the priesthood began to refuse to confer Gohonzon to those joining the Soka Gakkai or to any Soka Gakkai member. Furthermore, in November 1991, Nichiren Shoshu excommunicated the Soka Gakkai and its leaders, affecting some 10 million believers, an action unprecedented in the history of Buddhism.

In 1993, because the priesthood refused to make the Gohonzon available to Soka Gakkai members, the Soka Gakkai took responsibility for this important function, making available to all members a Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan, the 26th high priest and 18th century reformer of Nichiren Shoshu. [This Gohonzon was made available to the Soka Gakkai by Sendo Narita, chief priest of Joen-ji temple]. By doing so, the Soka Gakkai and SGI made

a fresh start as the organisation of practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism in complete accord with, and striving to fulfil Nichiren Daishonin's teachings and intent.

Since the excommunication by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, the Soka Gakkai and the SGI have continued to progressively develop around the world, whereas Nichiren Shoshu has shown steady decline. Because Nichiren Daishonin places emphasis on 'the proof of actual fact' (see 'Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain', WND-1, p. 599), this constitutes clear proof of which group has been practising Buddhism in accord with Nichiren's teachings and intent and which has not.

In December 2005, Nikken stepped down from his position as high priest. By that point, the priesthood had drifted far from the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin's philosophy. Despite the appointment of Nichinyo as new high priest, Nikken's attitude, behaviour and misinterpretations of Nichiren's teachings continue to influence the priesthood. And his influence will continue to prevail in Nichiren Shoshu so long as its successive high priests fail to recognise the error and injustice Nikken has perpetrated and the injury he has caused his own school of Buddhism.

Key Errors of Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood

There are six areas in which Nichiren Shoshu, especially under Nikken's influence, has committed serious errors in its interpretation and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings.

1. Conspiring to obstruct kosen-rufu

In November 1991, Nichiren Shoshu sent a letter of notification of excommunication to the Soka Gakkai. This lengthy document did not cite a single passage from Nichiren Daishonin's writings, nor did it refer to any established Buddhist doctrine or principle to explain their decision. The priesthood simply offered an authoritarian and emotional argument, repeating allegations that the Soka Gakkai had disobeyed them and not shown sufficient deference to their authority.

In *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, Nichiren Daishonin states, 'The "great vow" refers to the propagation of the Lotus Sutra.' (p. 82) In another writing, he refers to the 'great desire for widespread propagation [kosen-rufu].' ('The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life', WND-1, p. 217) These and other statements by the Daishonin make clear that the ultimate goal of his teachings is kosen-rufu, or the widespread propagation of the essence of the Lotus Sutra, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The Soka Gakkai has continued to take action, spreading Nichiren Buddhism as the Daishonin taught.

The so-called excommunication and attempt to disband the Soka Gakkai is equal to attempting to destroy the movement for kosen-rufu. This is in turn an offence against the Daishonin himself, whose aim was to relieve the suffering of all people, without exception, and enable them to become truly happy.

2. Promoting the false doctrine that the high priest is absolute

Based on the doctrine of the absolute authority and infallibility of the high priest, Nikken and his supporters claim that all believers must unquestioningly obey the high priest in all matters. Only through this priestly medium, they assert, is salvation possible. Nothing in the writings of Nichiren Daishonin or Nikko Shonin, Nichiren's direct disciple and immediate successor, supports such a doctrine. Rather, it is a dogma that directly contradicts what

Nichiren taught.

Nikko Shonin in his 'Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko' writes, 'Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views.' (see *The Untold History of the Fuji School*, p. 21) This admonition negates the doctrine of the absolute infallibility of the high priest.

3. Promoting an erroneous interpretation of the heritage of the Law

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood speaks of a 'heritage', 'lineage' or 'lifeblood' of the Law that is passed down solely between one high priest to the next. The content of this heritage is supposedly secret and inaccessible to ordinary people. While the priesthood holds this heritage to be the single most important element of its authority, claiming that it involves the transmission of an inscrutable essence, in actuality it amounts to nothing more than a ritual of succession.

The idea that there is some sort of mysterious, exclusive essence passed on from one high priest to the next has no basis in Nichiren's teachings. He stresses just the opposite. For example, in 'The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life', he emphasises that the heritage of the Law is open to everyone. He writes, 'Nichiren has been trying to awaken all people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood;' (WND-1, p. 217) it is not limited to a select group of people. He also states, 'Even embracing the Lotus Sutra would be useless without the heritage of faith.' (WND-1, p. 218) Therefore, the essence of inheriting the Law is faith. It is found nowhere but in practising and believing in Nichiren Daishonin's teachings just as he instructed.

4. The misuse of rituals and ceremonies

Rituals performed by the priesthood include funerals and other services, and, primarily in Japan, the bestowal of posthumous Buddhist names and the offering of wooden memorial (*toba*) tablets for the deceased.

Nichiren Shoshu priests demand substantial contributions for each of these functions and regard them as sources of income. Nichiren Daishonin, however, taught nothing about priests performing these ceremonial functions. They were added to the repertoire of priests' duties long after the Daishonin's time. Nevertheless, Nichiren Shoshu priests maintain that such Buddhist services and rituals can only be conducted by them and that these ceremonies are essential for believers to attain Buddhahood.

For instance, they claim that unless a Nichiren Shoshu priest conducts a funeral service, the deceased will never attain Buddhahood. But there is no record of any such teaching by the Daishonin.¹

On the contrary, Nichiren says, 'Therefore, because your beloved departed father chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo while he was alive, he was a person who attained Buddhahood in his present form.' ('White Horses and Swans', WND-1, p. 1064) In many of his writings, Nichiren emphasises that attaining Buddhahood is a matter of one's faith and practice during one's lifetime. Nowhere does Nichiren teach that Buddhahood depends upon the prayers or ceremonies of priest after one dies.

Disregarding this, the priesthood insists upon the necessity of Buddhist services conducted by priests for the attainment of Buddhahood. By doing so, they distort the philosophy and practice of Nichiren Buddhism.

5. Discrimination against lay believers

Nichiren Shoshu asserts that priests occupy a higher religious status than that of lay believers. In their view, the most inexperienced acolyte is superior to the most experienced lay believer. Priests, they claim, are to be viewed as mentors and lay believers, their disciples. But unlike the relationship of the oneness of mentor and disciple espoused by the Soka Gakkai, in Nichiren Shoshu, the disciple always holds an inferior status and can never become a 'mentor'.

Neither Nichiren Daishonin nor Nikko Shonin ever spoke of such a fixed relationship between the priests and lay believers. On the contrary, Nichiren Daishonin states, 'The Buddha surely considers anyone in this world who embraces the Lotus Sutra, whether lay man or woman, monk or nun, to be the lord of all living beings, and Brahama and Shakra most certainly hold that person in reverence.' ('The Unity of Husband and Wife', WND-1, p. 463).

6. Corruption in Nichiren Shoshu

Nichiren says, 'True priests are those who are honest and who desire little and yet know satisfaction.' ('The Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood', WND-1, p. 747) He taught that priests should behave with humility and live modestly.

In stark contrast with this teaching, the priesthood of the Nichiren Shoshu has become corrupt to the point that many of its priests, including Nikken himself, engage in questionable behaviour and crave extremes of luxury.

On 17 July 1989, 10 years into his tenure as high priest, Nikken had a tombstone for his family installed on the grounds of a Zen temple in Fukushima Prefecture. He reportedly spent more than \$40,000 for this tombstone imported from Sweden. In contrast, it was proven in a court case brought against the priesthood that the priests at the head temple had illegally buried 150-200 rice sacks stuffed with human remains in a field within the temple grounds. The chief magistrate of the case described the priesthood's management of its burial procedures as criminally negligent and counter to established religious norms of Japanese society.

In addition, Nikken as well as the chief priests of branch temples are known to have frequented expensive and exclusive luxury hot spring resort hotels in Japan and have also been charged with using paid female escorts.

Nichiren Daishonin strictly condemns any priest who dishonestly takes advantage of Buddhism for selfish ends as 'no better than an animal dressed in priestly robes'. ('The Fourteen Slanders' WND-1, p. 760) or as 'Law-devouring hungry spirits' ('The Origin of the Service for Deceased Ancestors', WND-1, p. 191).

He teaches repeatedly that practitioners should thoroughly challenge and refute such 'enemies of the Lotus Sutra' and 'enemies of the Buddha'. *Enemies* here refers to those who, out of ignorance, jealousy, arrogance or hatred, consistently defame and work to impede those who sincerely put the essential spirit of the Lotus Sutra into practice. As he states, 'However great the good causes one may make, or even if one reads and copies the entirety of the Lotus Sutra a thousand or ten thousand times, or attains the way of perceiving three thousand realms in a single moment of life, if one fails to denounce the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, it will be impossible to attain the way.' ('Encouragement to

a Sick Person', WND-1, p. 78) It is a most important responsibility of genuine Buddhist practitioners to challenge those who attempt to destroy Buddhism. To ignore those who act to degrade or distort or destroy Buddhism is to enable them to grow stronger.

In the end, to fail to challenge such people amounts to committing the same offence as them. But to fight against and win over such negative forces itself constitutes a practice that will open up and bring forth the life-condition of Buddhahood in those who do so.

(Endnotes)

1 Many Buddhist denominations in Japan, including Nichiren Shoshu, hold the beliefs that rituals and ceremonies are necessary to attain Buddhahood. But these beliefs have nothing to do with the core teachings of Buddhism. This is one reason why Buddhism in Japan has come to be known as 'funeral Buddhism'. This reflects the fact that while many people in Japan consider themselves to be Buddhists, few outside of the Soka Gakkai consistently carry out any form of Buddhist practice themselves. They simply believe that through the good graces and prayers of Buddhist priests, they will have a chance to attain Buddhahood after they die. Therefore, making donations to priests to conduct such services becomes a primary religious focus. This, of course, has nothing to do with the original spirit or intent of Shakyamuni Buddha or Nichiren Daishonin, who taught ordinary people to practice Buddhism themselves to overcome suffering and live the most fulfilling of lives.

Notes

Grade 1 Exam 2009
Questions

Section A: The Life of Nichiren Daishonin

This section is in two parts. A1 requires you to fill the spaces with dates, places and names or words; A2 requires you to write your answer in full. In the study exam, you will be set three questions from A1 and one question from A2.

A1

1. Nichiren Daishonin was born on [date] [month] [year], into a fishing family in Awa.
2. On the morning of [date] [month] [year] he chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for the first time. At midday, in front of the large audience that had gathered, he chanted [phrase], declaring it to be the only teaching that would enable all human beings in the Latter Day of the Law to reach supreme enlightenment in this lifetime.
3. Nichiren Daishonin formulated the conclusion of his research in a treatise entitled 'On Establishing the [word] Teaching for the Peace of the Land'. On [date] [month] [year], he presented this treatise to [name], the retired regent but still Japan's most influential political figure.
4. The Pure Land school priests continued to slander Nichiren Daishonin to the authorities. This time the regent himself, Hojo Nagatoki, supported their accusations and on [date] [month] [year], without even a court case, the government sent Nichiren Daishonin into exile to Ito, a Pure Land school stronghold on the Izu peninsula.
5. On the night of [date] [month] [year], Hei no Saemon and a troop of armed soldiers arrested Nichiren Daishonin. Treating him like a traitor, they took him to [place] beach, an execution site near Kamakura: on his own initiative, Hei no Saemon had decided to have Nichiren Daishonin beheaded.
6. The Daishonin was exiled to Sado Island in the Sea of Japan. Here, he wrote many important writings including, 'The [word] of the Eyes', and 'The Object of Devotion for Observing the [word]',
7. He left Ichinosawa on 13 March 1274 for Kamakura and met Heino Saemon at the latter's request. For the [number] time, he remonstrated with the government, warning that the Mongol invasion was imminent, but still the government refused to listen.
8. Nichiren Daishonin was deeply moved by the attitude of these disciples, the Atsuhara farmers, who were ready to give their lives if need be to defend the Law. Realising that the time had come for him to fulfil his ultimate purpose in life, on [date] [month] [year], he inscribed the Dai- [word].
9. Shortly after this, on 8 September 1282, his health deteriorating further, the Daishonin left Mount [word], where he had lived for nine years, and went to the Hitachi hot springs en route to the residence of one of his lifelong followers, Ikegami Munenaka.
10. On [date] [month] [year], Nichiren Daishonin having fulfilled his purpose and mission passed away At Ikegami Munenaka's home, aged 60.

A2

1. Explain briefly what happened at the 'Tatsunokuchi persecution'
2. Describe the situation in Japan when Nichiren Daishonin submitted his treatise entitled 'On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land'.
3. Explain what happened at the 'Atsuhara Persecution'

'In the exam, you will be set ONE question from sections B, C, D and E'

SECTION B: PRINCIPLES OF FAITH IN SGI

The Foreword to the Rules and Regulations of the Soka Gakkai

1. Explain the spiritual flow of Buddhism from Shakyamuni to Nichiren Daishonin and then to the SGI.
2. Describe the contributions to the movement for kosen-rufu made by each of the first three Presidents.
3. Which principles are at the core of 'the spirit of the Soka Gakkai'?
4. Name the four religious tenets of the Soka Gakkai and give a short explanation of each one.

SECTION C. BASICS OF BUDDHISM

Write a short paragraph about the following principles:

1. Poison into medicine
2. Practice for oneself and others
3. Fundamental Darkness
4. Casting off the transient and revealing the true
5. Three Obstacles and Four Devils
6. Bodhisattvas of the Earth

SECTION D: GOSHO: 'THE DRAGON GATE'

Q1; Please fill in the space indicated by brackets

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to [name] at Mount Minobu. In this letter Daishonin praises him because he courageously protects other followers during the [name] persecution which occurred in 1279. Nichiren Daishonin encourages him as follow; "My wish is that all my disciples make a [word] [word]."

Q2: Please give a brief explanation of the following key study points explained in this gosho lecture:

1. To carry out your practice in the spirit of oneness of mentor and disciple.
2. To make a great vow for kosen-rufu
3. To attain Buddhahood through surmounting difficulties (Give three points).

Section E: Priesthood Issue

1. a) What was the stance taken by the first two presidents regarding the Shinto talisman?
b) What was the result of this situation?
2. There are six areas in which Nichiren Shoshu has committed serious errors in its interpretation and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. Name two of the errors and explain why they are incorrect.

Notes

Notes

SGL-UK Study Department, 11th of May 2009