

The Untold History of the Fuji School: The Origins of the Temple Issue (8)

This series is based on The Dark History of the Fuji School: Revealing the Origin of the Nikken Sect (Ankoku no Fuji Shumonshi: Nikken Shu no Engen o Kiru) by Hajime Kawai, a vice senior advisor of the Soka Gakkai Study Department. The last installment introduced the seventeenth high priest, Nissei, noted for enshrining Shakyamuni's statue at several temples, as well as the influence of Kyodai'in, the powerful lay patron, in appointing Nissei's successor, Nisshun.

Chapter 8: Nichikan: The Restorer of the Fuji School

(1) The Refutation of Erroneous Teachings

THE twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan (1665–1726), is known as the great restorer of the Fuji School because he refuted erroneous beliefs and traditions brought into the school by his predecessors. As recounted in previous installments, the head temple, Taiseki-ji, turned to another temple, Yobo-ji¹, to fill the position of high priest when capable candidates could not be found within their own priesthood. The result was the introduction of teachings and practices contrary to those established by Nichiren Daishonin. This was something Nichikan saw as urgently needing correction.

Born into a family of the samurai class, Nichikan entered the priesthood at 18 and studied under Nichiei, the twenty-fourth high priest. At 24, he went to the Hosokusa Seminary—a Buddhist seminary in Hosokusa Village, Kazusa Province²—to study further. The Hosokusa Seminary was established jointly by Taiseki-ji and the Eight Chapters School, which maintained that the Daishonin's core teaching lay in eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra—the fifteenth through the twenty-second. After nine years, Nichikan became a professor at the seminary.

He later moved to Taiseki-ji and lived in Renzo-bo, a lodging temple on the head temple grounds. He assumed the important position of study master, generally held by those considered candidates for the office of high priest. In 1718, he became the twenty-sixth high priest.

Nichikan practiced and studied diligently in his efforts to clarify the Daishonin's Buddhism. He lectured and wrote extensively on the Daishonin's writings and completed his most vital work, *The Six-Volume Writings*, in 1725. The purpose of this work was to refute the erroneous doctrines of the various Nichiren schools and clarify the orthodoxy of the Daishonin's Buddhism. These six volumes include: "The Three-fold Secret Teaching," "Meanings Hid-den in the Depths," "Interpretations Based on the Law," "Teachings for the Latter Day," "The Practice of This School" and "The Three Robes of This School."

In "Teachings for the Latter Day," Nichikan specifically took up the doctrines propounded by Nisshin (1508–76) of Yobo-ji. In the first half, he points out the errors of reciting the entire twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra. In the latter half, he refutes the practice of worshipping statues of Shakyamuni Bud-dha. By correcting

Nisshin's teachings, Nichikan purged Taiseki-ji of the unorthodoxy espoused by previous high priests who had been influenced by Yobo-ji. By the time Nichikan became high priest, some 400 years after the Daishonin's passing, Nichiren schools had distorted his teachings and promulgated various misinterpretations. Through *The Six-Volume Writings*, Nichikan reestablished the orthodoxy of the Daishonin's Buddhism as transmitted to his legitimate successor, Nikko Shonin.

According to the "Accounts of High Priest Nichikan," when Nichikan bestowed *The Six-Volume Writings* to his disciples, he states: "With these six volumes of writing, which are like the lion king, you need not be afraid of the various sects and schools in the nation even if they all come to this temple for debate like a pack of foxes..." (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 5, pp. 355–56).

Nichikan believed that the purpose of Buddhist study was to propagate the Daishonin's Buddhism. In the beginning of "The Threefold Secret Teaching," he states: "There are many important matters in this writing. This I did solely to perpetuate the Law. My disciples should deeply understand my intention" (*The Six-Volume Writings*, p. 3).

He begins "Interpretations Based on the Law" by stating: "This is solely for the sake of the widespread propagation of the Law" (*ibid.*, p. 115).

Through his writings, Nichikan reconfirmed the basics of faith, practice and study. He clarified Nichiren Daishonin as the original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law and the Gohonzon as the basis of faith. Through his efforts came a period of unprecedented development in Buddhist study. Many student priests traveled to the Fuji School to further their studies.

Nichikan also contributed greatly to the construction of buildings on the grounds of Taiseki-ji. He oversaw the construction of a main gate and reception hall on the temple grounds. He built the Ever-Chanting Hall and a lodging temple, the Ishinobo. He also left behind the funds later used for the construction of the Five-Storied Pagoda, which was completed in 1749 during the tenure of the thirty-first high priest, Nichiin.

According to "The Accounts of High Priest Nichikan," on August 19, 1726, Nichikan died peacefully after enjoying his favorite meal of buckwheat noodles. After dinner, he declared cheerfully, "How wonderful the City of Tranquil Light is!" then chanted daimoku (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 5, p. 359).

Nichiko Hori, the fifty-ninth high priest and noted historian of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, said of Nichikan:

It was said that Teacher Nichikan was held in such high esteem that the day would not break nor the night fall without his presence. This was due to his behavior and character rather than his scholarship, for one cannot command trust from the priesthood and laity if he is lax in everyday conduct regardless of his achievements in Buddhist study and debate. In this regard, Teacher Nichikan was extremely modest and honest. I believe this is why Teacher Nichikan's faith, let alone his understanding of Buddhism, flowed through the people. (*The Daibyakurenge*, November 1956, p. 20)

Nichikan gained the respect and trust of those who knew him; and that is how he reestablished the Daishonin's correct spirit in the hearts of believers. Nichikan's life was eloquent proof that a high priest of outstanding faith, practice and study as well as outstanding character need not invoke the mysterious "transmission of the Law" to support his office or promote his own infallibility.

(2) Nichikan's emphasis on the basics of faith and practice

Nichikan viewed study as a means to deepen faith and practice—never for merely displaying one's knowledge. At the end of his commentary on the Daishonin's "On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings," he states:

If we do not constantly ponder the four dictums³ and if we ignore propagation, our hearts will become accomplices in slandering the Law. If we do not accomplish propagation with our voices, they will become accomplices in the slander of the Law. If we do not face the object of devotion with prayer beads in our hands, our bodies will become accomplices in the slander of the Law. Therefore, those who ponder the object of devotion of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, face the object of devotion of the "Life Span" chapter of the essential teaching and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo of the actual 3,000 realms in a single life-moment—that is, the Buddhism of sowing contained in the "Life Span" chapter of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra—shall be the ones propagating the Law through the three types of karma—thoughts, words and deeds. (*The Collection of High Priest Nichikan's Commentaries*, p. 767)

Nichikan teaches us that our basic practice lies in gongyo, daimoku and teaching others the greatness of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. He warns that when we become slack in this basic practice, we develop a tendency to go against the Law.

Nichikan also expounds on the meaning of chanting daimoku:

So know that the daimoku of true Buddhism must be accompanied by faith and practice. The chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in the object of devotion of true Buddhism shall be known as the daimoku of true Buddhism. But although there is faith, if it lacks practice, it shall not yet be known as such.... Therefore, be aware that the daimoku of true Buddhism shall be the kind that encompasses both faith and practice. (*The Six-Volume Writings*, p. 107)

The twenty-sixth high priest explains that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo cannot be called a correct practice of the Daishonin's teaching unless it is accompanied by sincere faith in the Gohonzon and concrete actions for the propagation of Buddhism.

Commenting on the passage, "simply chanting the daimoku" from the Daishonin's "The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-3, 9), Nichikan states: "Here 'simply chanting the daimoku' means to chant with faith. If one chants the Mystic Law without faith, it is not called chanting the daimoku" (*The Collection of High Priest*

Nichikan's Commentaries, p. 639). He reiterates the point that no matter how much we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, if we lack faith, all our efforts will be to no avail.

(3) The Daishonin's Buddhism and the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan spread worldwide

IN October 1993, the SGI began conferring Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan upon its worldwide membership. This was in response to the fact that Nikken Abe, the sixty-seventh high priest, had excommunicated the SGI and ceased issuing Gohonzon unless SGI members seceded and joined the temple. Sendo Narita, chief priest of Joen-ji in Tochigi, Japan, who had renounced his affiliation with Taiseki-ji in protest, proposed to the SGI that a Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon in the possession of his temple be reproduced and made available. The SGI accepted this proposal.

The Daishonin writes: "Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood" (MW-1, 24). He inscribed the Gohonzon for this purpose—that all people can receive the heritage of the Law and attain Buddhahood.

In this regard, Nichikan comments:

All those who accept and embrace this object of devotion will enter the Buddha Way of time without beginning.... The bodies of us ordinary people who enter the Buddha Way of time without beginning are exactly the Buddhas of absolute freedom from time without beginning. The entity of the Buddha of absolute freedom is nothing other than us ordinary people.... This is what is meant by the oneness of mentor and disciple." (*The Collection of High Priest Nichikan's Commentaries*, p. 488)

Through our faith and practice to the Gohonzon, our lives reveal the life of the Buddha of absolute freedom, that is, a state of life no different from that of Nichiren Daishonin. This, Nichikan stresses, is the meaning of the oneness of mentor and disciple. The heritage of the Daishonin's Buddhism, therefore, is nothing other than faith in the Gohonzon. It is the lifeblood of faith that enables us to attain Buddhahood.

The mission of the Daishonin's disciples lies in spreading his teaching so that many people take faith in the Gohonzon and attain Buddhahood, thus creating the basis for a peaceful society. The fact that Nikken excommunicated the SGI, which has been propagating the Daishonin's teaching on a global scale, clearly demonstrates that he has renounced the mission of the Daishonin's disciple as well as the role of high priest. In light of such circumstances, the SGI, in order to fulfill its mission and responsibility as the Daishonin's disciples, began conferring the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon for the further spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood criticizes the SGI's conferral of the Gohonzon,

claiming that unless conferred by the high priest, Gohonzon are devoid of the heritage of the Law and have no beneficial power. The tradition of entrusting the high priest at Taiseki-ji with the transcription and conferral of Gohonzon was to protect the integrity of the Daishonin's Buddhism and further promote its widespread propagation. It was never meant to create a privileged class of clergy with the power to manipulate believers with the Gohonzon. Neither was the tradition meant to allow the clergy to exploit believers financially through the conferral of the Gohonzon.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, "Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra" (MW-1, 25). Those who lack faith and make no effort to spread the Law, not to mention deliberately obstructing its propagation, do not inherit the heritage of his Buddhism. This is why the current priesthood has lost its qualification to reproduce and confer Gohonzon.

The heritage of the Daishonin's Buddhism exists only in the selfless dedication to kosen-rufu of millions of SGI members. That the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon issued by the SGI are in accord with the Daishonin's teaching and spirit is also proven by the benefits they have received.

The priesthood's assertion that the SGI-issued Gohonzon are counterfeit because they are not sanctioned and consecrated by the high priest or issued by the head temple contradicts its own recorded history. Up until the mid-1950s, a number of branch temples reproduced Gohonzon transcribed by past high priests with whom they had strong ties. These branch temples then freely issued those Gohonzon to their parish members. Of course those branch temples never asked for the high priest's permission, nor did the high priest perform the so-called "eye-opening ceremony" upon those Gohonzon to consecrate them.

Even after the head temple established its sole authority to reproduce and confer Gohonzon in the 1960s, the high priest never performed an "eye-opening ceremony" on every Gohonzon issued. In fact, priests have testified that most Gohonzon were shipped out of the head temple without receiving the high priest's consecration. Now they claim it is essential to infuse the Gohonzon with the power derived from the "Living Essence" of the Daishonin, which is only possessed by the high priest. There is no record in any of the Daishonin's writings that he performed an "eye-opening ceremony" on the Gohonzon. Nor did he mention anywhere that it is necessary.

The Gohonzon is already the embodiment of the Mystic Law; it is already the eye of all Buddhas with which to perceive our own Buddha nature. What draws upon the power of the Buddha, and the power of the Law in the Gohonzon, is our own powers of faith and practice. When those dedicated to the spread of Buddhism pray to the Gohonzon with sincere faith, they manifest the same state of life as Nichiren Daishonin.

(Translated and edited by SGI-USA Study Department)

To be continued

1. Yobo-ji was an offshoot of the Fuji School that propounded original doctrines and practices contrary to Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. It was originally part of the Fuji School under the name Juhon-ji. Its chief priest Nisshun combined with another temple in 1550 and renamed them Yobo-ji. See May 1998 *Living Buddhism*, p. 40, and August 1998 *Living Buddhism*, p. 4).
2. Present-day Oami Shirasato-machi, Chiba Prefecture.
3. Four dictums: Also called the four maxims. Four statements with which Nichiren Daishonin denounced the four most influential Buddhist sects of his day, summarizing his repudiation of their doctrines. They are: (1) "Nembutsu leads to the hell of incessant suffering," (2) "Zen is the teaching of devils," (3) "Shingon will ruin the nation," (4) "Ritsu is traitorous."

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