

Formalism Vs. Faith
By JEFF FARR
SGI-USA Youth Division Study Committee

The Lotus Sutra...is divided into two categories, the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching. One is as different from the other as fire is from water or heaven from earth. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 275)

Nichiren Daishonin devoted great effort to distinguishing between Theravada and Mayahana Buddhism, provisional Mayahana and the Lotus Sutra, and the theoretical and essential teachings of the Lotus Sutra. He felt he had to make these clear distinctions between what his Buddhism is and is not for the sake of the people's happiness. This is a challenge we still face today.

Over the last seven years, the temple issue, more than anything, has helped me to understand these distinctions. Dr. Jane Hurst recently said at Harvard University that the SGI has benefitted from the temple issue in being able to clarify the Daishonin's Buddhism. (This was at an event sponsored by the Boston Research Center where Dr. Hurst, who has studied the SGI-USA over the years, spoke specifically on the temple issue.) The temple, unlike the SGI, she said, has emphasized formalism over Buddhist faith. Formalism vs. faith — this Buddhism's uniqueness is indeed found in the complete emphasis it places on the spirituality in each person rather than on religious formalities. Faith is the essential.

Realizing that there's no benefit in practicing Buddhism without this core of individual faith, Nichiren Daishonin made strict distinctions between the theoretical and essential, between formalism and faith. SGI President Ikeda in June gave the above Goshu quote to the Kansai student division with the same intent, warning them to never be confused between the theoretical and essential. Thanks to the SGI's religious revolution of the last several years, all of us have had the chance to learn this crucial distinction — what this Buddhism is and what it is not.

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