

All We Need To Do To Attain Enlightenment

President Ikeda shares the research of Dr. Jane Hurst on the temple issue. The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood has been unable to develop a global perspective, she concludes, while the SGI has moved beyond the limits of Japanese culture.

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the Chubu Representatives Conference, Chubu Culture Center, Nagoya, Japan, May 26.

Nothing makes me happier than talking with my wonderful friends in this great region of Chubu. Nothing is more memorable.

In his work *The Geography of Human Life* (Jinsei Chirigaku), first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi analyzes what he terms the “gravitational pull of cities,” the power that draws people to urban areas. He also discusses the gravitational pull of Nagoya.

Leaving aside scholarly analysis for a moment, I feel as though I have been, on my return from Shanghai, drawn first to Kansai, and then to Chubu by the gravitational pull of faith of all of you practicing here in solid unity with Chubu Chief Kazuo Ono and Women’s Division Chief Toshiko Koizumi.

Chubu has become a strong, undefeatable fighting force. It has truly become an unshakable bastion of kosen-rufu.

A Sublime State

What is the ideal state of mind a person of faith should strive for?

First, we mustn’t be afraid of anything. It is important to remain firm in our convictions. There is a great deal of scheming and duplicity in the world, but it is foolish to allow ourselves to be swayed by such things; they lead to unhappiness. The Mystic Law and Nichiren Daishonin are absolutely free of any falsehood. Therefore, to dedicate our lives to kosen-rufu is to lead the wisest possible existence.

In our practice of the Daishonin’s teachings, we may sometimes encounter unpleasantness from others; we may also exert ourselves twice as hard as others. But this is all part of our Buddhist practice.

The Daishonin teaches that we can attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. To do so, we have to pass through the trials of the three obstacles and four devils. Yet that’s all we need to do to attain enlightenment in this lifetime and enjoy boundless Buddhahood over eternity. So no matter what happens, it’s essential that we keep advancing joyfully and courageously, never succumbing to fear.

Second, we must live with vibrant hope. Nothing is stronger than hope. The Mystic Law is itself eternal hope. Happiness belongs to those who never despair, no matter what happens.

Third, we need to cultivate a life where we thoroughly enjoy ourselves at all times. We should have such joy that, even at the time of death, we can declare with a happy smile: “That was wonderful! Where shall I go next?” This is the mind of a person with strong faith. Such individuals will be reborn without delay, and in a form and place exactly according with their desires.

Some of you might be unhappy with your relationships and think to yourselves, “What a detestable spouse I’ve chosen!” But it’s not as though you’re going to have to be together for 5,000 years! From the Buddhist perspective, this life is but a moment in the eternal

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course of existence. When you elevate your state of life, even the shouting of a spouse or partner can sound as nice as a jazz or pop tune!

Faith enables us to attain a generous, all-embracing state of mind where we can enjoy everything. As the Daishonin says, faith in the Mystic Law is “the greatest of all joys” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 788).

A Scholar Studies the Temple Issue

The day before yesterday [May 24], I received a significant report from Boston. A conference titled “Buddhism in America” was recently cosponsored by the Buddhist Research Forum of Harvard University, one of the world’s foremost centers of learning, and the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, which I founded. The conference was held at Harvard Divinity School — very close to where I twice spoke at the university.

At the conference, Dr. Jane Hurst announced her research findings in a talk titled “A Buddhist Reformation in the 20th Century: Causes and Implications of the Conflict Between the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood.” Dr. Hurst is a professor of philosophy and religion at Gallaudet University, Washington, D.C.

Gallaudet University is the only institution of higher education in the world designed specifically for the hearing impaired. Dr. Hurst teaches philosophy and religion using both voice and sign language.

Dr. Hurst examined the split between the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood in her speech, and Masao Yokota, president of the BRC, kindly forwarded me a summary. With the permission of Dr. Hurst, I will now briefly share her main points.

Parallels With the Protestant Reformation

Dr. Hurst is a prominent American Buddhologist, and is also well known for her studies on the psychology of the deaf and hearing impaired. She offered an insightful analysis of the priesthood issue based on her 24 years of research on Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai.

Dr. Hurst explained that she watched the split between Nichiren Shoshu and the SGI with keen interest because she was struck by its similarities with the rift between the Catholic Church and Protestants in the 16th century — the Protestant Reformation. Giving some historical background, she pointed out that the late 15th and early 16th centuries marked the eve of the Industrial Revolution; that Europe was experiencing great social, economic and technological change. Moreover, the “discovery” of the Americas opened the eyes of many Europeans to the world.

However, the Catholic Church, she said, was at that time unable to abandon its narrow, Rome-centered orientation. And its teachings, too, continued to reflect a largely self-centered, myopic worldview. In addition, she argued, the corruption of the Church, most famously in the sale of indulgences, led to widespread exploitation of the laity. These circumstances made it difficult for the Catholic Church to respond to the demands of a new age, allowing the Protestant Reformation to flourish.

Dr. Hurst noted that the latter half of the 20th century has been an age of thriving international exchange, a time when people need to consider the self and society from a global perspective. She pointed out that although Nichiren Daishonin had a global vision, aspiring for the worldwide spread of his teachings, the Nichiren Shoshu priests have been unable to break away from a Japan-oriented focus. This has prevented them from adapting to changing times. By contrast, she said that the SGI has developed a popular movement based on a global perspective.

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Dr. Hurst clearly discerns the historic significance of our movement, calling it a “Buddhist Reformation in the 20th Century.”

Hierarchy Vs. Equality, Formalism Vs. Faith

Dr. Hurst analyzed the split in terms of the following key issues: 1) priestly authority vs. lay creativity; 2) hierarchical organization vs. egalitarian organization; 3) emphasis on sacrament and ritual vs. emphasis on individual faith; 4) a focus on tradition as the key to understanding scripture vs. a focus on scripture alone; 5) a view of religion that is local, conservative and mystical vs. one that is global, progressive and rational; 6) a spiritual focus that is otherworldly vs. one that is engaged with the world.

These are brilliant insights. I heartily agree with her on each point.

Benefits of the Split

Dr. Hurst also said that there have been important changes in the SGI since its split with the priesthood. As one example, she pointed to the growing globalization of the SGI movement, that the SGI has moved beyond the limits of Japanese culture and tradition. Also, that the SGI is becoming more democratic she attributed to the elimination of an intermediary between individuals and the Gohonzon.

Dr. Hurst credited President Ikeda for a major contribution to this process. Choosing the moral high ground rather than succumbing to the temptations of authoritarianism, she said, the SGI president has worked to realize a more democratic organization. She pointed to the SGI-USA as an example of an organization that, as a result of President Ikeda's efforts to create a more democratic and open organization, is pervaded with a sense of equality and tolerance.

Dr. Hurst also pointed out that the SGI is actively developing intercultural and interfaith dialogue through the BRC and other SGI-affiliated organizations. She said that she did not expect to see the SGI go back to its former relationship with the priesthood, because the positive effects for the SGI following the split appear to be too great. In other words, Dr. Hurst said that we have benefitted from no longer being with the priesthood.

It has been seven years since the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood embarked on its reckless course. In that time, we have reached the point where a perspective such as Dr. Hurst's — which represents the views of many leading thinkers and observers around the world — is being presented at a conference at Harvard University, an institution with a great scholarly tradition. This is an address of great historic significance. I want to see it handed down to later generations.

Faith Matters Most

Next, I want to confirm some important basic points in faith.

First, whether children with parents who are SGI leaders practice Buddhism or not is often determined by the mother's faith more than anything. This is according to presidents Makiguchi and Toda. If leaders can't inspire their children to embrace faith, they are doing a disservice not only to their children but to themselves.

Also, there is no need to show the children of leaders any special consideration. The SGI places highest importance on faith. In the SGI, those who are truly exerting themselves for kosen-rufu are most praiseworthy.

President Toda said: “Those who do not value the organization are practicing self-centered faith. With such faith, you cannot expect to receive the profound benefits of this

practice.” Working hard within the organization for people’s happiness and welfare is itself noble Buddhist practice. Advancing kosen-rufu and defeating devilish forces — this arduous struggle that resembles scaling a sheer cliff — is the challenge of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

It is also important that leaders love the members as they would their own children. This is the spirit of a genuine leader. Often when he finished a lecture on the Lotus Sutra, President Toda would humbly express his gratitude to the participants, saying deferentially, “Thank you for listening!”

Remembering President Toda’s sincere spirit, leaders should never behave arrogantly toward the members. And it is important that male leaders, in particular, absolutely refrain from acting in a high-handed, authoritarian way toward women. Men who are despotic in the organization are often mice at home!

The SGI Continues To Flourish

It is clear that Nichiren Shoshu led by Nikken has begun to tumble down the dismal slope of decline, the fate that the Daishonin said lay in store for those who “despised the votaries of the Lotus Sutra” — who, “though they seemed to be free from punishment at first, eventually...were all doomed to fall” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 241).

In contrast, the SGI continues to shine all the more, with the radiance of a dawning world religion, into the next century, the new millennium, making a reality of the Daishonin’s golden words: “Eventually kosen-rufu is certain to be achieved throughout the entire world” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 816).

We are following a diamond path, a global path, an eternal path, a victorious path. My friends of Chubu, I sincerely hope you will join me in advancing along this path and paving it with glory, with unflagging confidence and joy.

Thank you for gathering here today. You all have my deepest gratitude.

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