

**SIGN POSTS: Getting the Here Out of Hell**  
**By JEFF FARR**  
**SGI-USA Youth Division Study Committee**

**The Lotus Sutra reveals this truth [that the pure land and hell exist nowhere but in our hearts], and one who embraces the Lotus Sutra will realize that hell is itself the Land of Tranquil Light. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 208)**

According to Nichiren Daishonin, Hell is a life-condition everyone experiences, not a fiery place down below. When he wrote this Goshō, he had been remonstrating with priests of the Shingon and other Buddhist sects, who were always telling people to beware falling into the gnashing teeth of Hell at the moment of their deaths. But the Daishonin wanted people to realize Hell was ultimately something within themselves, something that they could thus overcome.

What's most liberating about this idea to me is that you can escape Hell in the here and now, you don't have to stay there forever. I wasn't raised a Christian, but I remember, growing up, my Christian friends telling me all about Hell. And what would terrify me most was not that it was such an awful place but the idea of eternal damnation, that you had to stay there forever and ever. When I became a Buddhist, I was relieved to hear the Buddhist version of Hell was so different from this.

Lately, I've been thinking about the Daishonin's intent in writing this Goshō: It was clearly to save people from Hell. When you read it you feel his determination to destroy the very idea of Hell — he says Hell can become the Land of Tranquil Light. The priests of Nichiren Shōshū, however, now planning to excommunicate Soka Gakkai members a second time, say that if you're excommunicated you'll go to Hell, if you chant to the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon you'll go to Hell, etc.

Nichiren Daishonin never excommunicated anyone, Shakyamuni never excommunicated anyone; they weren't hot on sending people to Hell. The priests, instead of wanting to save people from Hell, seem eager to send them there. Sure doesn't sound like Nichiren Daishonin in this Goshō.

**WT**