

## STANDS TO REASON: Not Even the High Priest

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**Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against Buddhism and holds his own views. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1618)**

This is article 17 of Nikko Shonin's 26 admonitions. Although the admonitions were not written by Nichiren Daishonin, they are included in the *Gosho Zenshu* for their perfect expression of the Daishonin's desire to eternalize this Buddhism. They're warnings to ensure that this religion continues.

Nikko Shonin wrote them in 1333 when he was 88 years old. His audience was clearly all of us, not just priests. At the beginning of the admonitions, Nikko Shonin explains: "I will here set forth some articles for the sake of later students of Buddhism. This is solely because I treasure the [Daishonin's] golden words regarding kosen-rufu" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1617).

Article 17 is especially significant today, because at a time when the temple is saying that the high priest is infallible, Nikko Shonin is on record disagreeing. As SGI President Ikeda said concerning article 17, "Nikko Shonin was concerned about the emergence of the kind of high priests who should not be followed."

The spirit from the early days of this organization has been to heed this warning. In 1943, President Makiguchi, in refusing to follow the high priest when the priesthood wanted him to accept the Shinto talisman, started our tradition of upholding article 17.

Nikken's decision to tear down the Grand Main Temple is the most recent example of a high priest going against Buddhism, a high priest who should not be followed. With this destructive move, Nikken is breaking a cardinal rule of the Daishonin's Buddhism and the 26 admonitions: to respond to believers' sincerity with equal or greater sincerity. In article 14, for instance, Nikko Shonin says, "As for practitioners who treasure the Law more highly than their own lives, even if they are but humble teachers of the Law, you must hold them in great esteem, revering them as you would the Buddha" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1618).

This the Daishonin did continually, beginning letter after letter to his believers with his appreciation for their offerings. Through his words, he bowed to them.

But Nikken looks at the members' unprecedented offering of the Main Temple, scoffs at it and tears it down. If you're a temple member, you're not supposed to say a thing against this.

Before the temple issue began in late 1990, many of us in the SGI-USA were unaware of article 17 and the precedent Makiguchi had set. We followed Nikken and the other priests in hopes of making our religion the best it could be; we thought that fostering harmony with Nikken and his priests was the best way to spread this Buddhism.

But harmony with a high priest who's wrong, as we've learned these past seven years, doesn't help anything grow. Harmony with a high priest who's wrong actually goes against Buddhism.

So, here we are on our own. Without priests. Now we have to do what we think is right, based on studying the Daishonin's writings. We have to follow the Law and trust ourselves. And this self-sufficient energy, this self-resourcefulness, is what we believe will spread this Buddhism more than ever before.

This, we can trust.

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