

Gakkai Attorneys Complete Cross-Examination of Nikken
By JEFF FARR, Associate Editor
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More than 100 times on May 18, as if it were his strategy, Nikken answered questions from Soka Gakkai attorneys with variations of “I don’t know” and “I don’t remember.” So ended an important chapter in the Seattle Incident trial: After three appearances in court, Nikken has completed his testimony.

Despite the fact that the Seattle Incident trial is Nikken’s libel suit against the Soka Gakkai, his attorneys tried for years to keep him out of court. Last September, the court ordered him to appear, and after his Dec. 22 direct examination and Feb. 2 cross-examination by Soka Gakkai attorneys, the presiding judge, Fumio Shimada, ordered Nikken to appear once more for further cross-examination.

All in all, the Feb. 2 and May 18 sessions comprised more than four hours of questioning of Nikken by the Soka Gakkai side.

At issue is what Nikken did the night of March 19–20, 1963, after he held a Gohonzon-conferral ceremony in Seattle. According to the testimony of the late Hiroe Clow, an SGI-USA member, he had an altercation with prostitutes and a subsequent run-in with the police from which she, in effect, rescued him. According to Nikken, it was an uneventful evening spent alone: He left his hotel only for a walk and a couple double shots of whiskey at a nearby bar.

Nikken said on Dec. 22 that the bar he patronized was the Carousel Room (this name is recorded in the diary of his 1963 U.S. visit, which the plaintiff introduced in December along with a photograph of the bar’s exterior). When the Soka Gakkai attorneys introduced evidence May 18 that the bar was frequented by prostitutes, Nikken said, “I sat down at the counter by the entrance, so I don’t know very much about the inside of the bar.” He also said, “I never went in such a place.”

The attorneys pointed out as well that from the Carousel Room it would only have been a six- to seven-minute walk to the scene of the incident, 7th Street and Pike. Nikken did not deny this. But the priesthood’s public relations chief, Kogaku Akimoto, has been saying of late that the site and the bar were not within walking distance of each other.

In a seeming attempt to cast doubt on Nikken as a witness, the attorneys asked him many questions not directly related to the night in question but pertinent to previous testimony by Nikken and Mrs. Clow. Again, many of his answers were “I don’t know” or something similarly inconclusive.

For instance, the attorneys asked him about May 3, 1963. Mrs. Clow testified that on that day the previous high priest, Nittatsu, with Nikken present, apologized to her. “I’m sorry for causing you trouble,” High Priest Nittatsu said, according to Mrs. Clow. “I know him [Nikken] well enough.”

This apology occurred at the Nihon University Auditorium in Tokyo after the 25th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting. Nikken previously denied the story, saying that “in no way was Clow invited to High Priest Nittatsu’s room.” Showing Nikken a photograph of him with Mrs. Clow at the doorway to the room, one of the attorneys asked, “Isn’t this Mrs. Clow?” “Well, it looks like her,” Nikken answered. “Isn’t this priest you?” was the next question. “Well, it looks like me,” he answered.

Mrs. Clow also testified in 1995 that, over the years, her family received various gifts, including prayer beads for her daughter’s wedding, from Nikken and his wife. These were to buy her silence, Mrs. Clow believed. Nikken has denied sending the family gifts, at one time even asserting that he didn’t know Mrs. Clow had a daughter. The defense on May 18

introduced a video, though, of daughter Judy Clow's March 1983 wedding, in which Chief Priest Shobo Sakata of the Los Angeles temple, Myoho-ji, presents the beads to her and clearly states that "these are a gift from High Priest Nikken." On viewing the video, Nikken acknowledged Sakata's statement as fact.

After the May 18 cross-examination, the Soka Gakkai side was confident that Nikken had been discredited. "Throughout the cross-examination, whenever the questioning came to a crucial point, he repeated, 'I don't recall' or 'I don't know,'" said Soka Gakkai attorney Morio Miyahara. "Furthermore, he often contradicted his own statements from the direct examination."

SGI General Director Eiichi Wada, in a memo to all SGI organizations, similarly pointed out that "Nikken repeatedly said, 'I do not remember' and 'I don't know,' without presenting any logical arguments to defend himself against the evidence...."

A Nichiren Shoshu Administrative Office memo meanwhile claimed the session a great victory for the temple side: "The high priest, with his testimony of truth, completely crushed the Gakkai's insistent machinations in the previous cross-examination [Feb. 2]." The memo also predicted a favorable decision for Nikken in the near future.

The next session, June 16, will be a closed session with attorneys from both sides going over evidence with the presiding judge. Although the temple side has been requesting the judge to reach a verdict for many months, neither side knows how close the court is to announcing one.

In the United States, the six Nichiren Shoshu temples have been playing down the current trial — it's rarely mentioned at temple meetings and not at all in the temple magazine or temple newsletters. The U.S. temples have tried to deflect attention from the Tokyo trial by focusing on Mrs. Clow's stateside libel case against Nikken, which, because of two jurisdictional rulings against it, has now been dropped. No decision was ever reached on the merits of Mrs. Clow's case.

Although much evidence discovered in preparation for that trial is now being used in the Tokyo District Court trial, the two cases are entirely separate. Many temple members, though, have misunderstandings that the U.S. and Japan cases are one and the same, and that the jurisdictional decisions by California courts were on the merits of Mrs. Clow's case, which they were not.

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