

STANDS TO REASON: The Century of Anyone

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The Buddha surely considers anyone in this world who embraces the Lotus Sutra, whether man or woman, monk or nun, to be the lord of all living beings.... (“The Unity of Husband and Wife,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 156)

A letter full of promises — in 1275, at Mount Minobu, Nichiren Daishonin wrote Nichigen-nyo that she would definitely become happy, that she was without question a Buddha. Nichigen-nyo, Shijo Kingo’s wife, had written to the Daishonin to report her turning 33, which was considered an unlucky age for women in Japan. And he had written back that “the bad luck of your thirty-third year will turn into the happiness of your thirty-third year” (MW-5, 158).

When the Daishonin wrote letters to the women among his believers, he was often going up against the formidable pre-Lotus Sutra teaching, ingrained in Japanese society, that women could never attain enlightenment. This deeply influenced people’s view of women, including, obviously, women’s view of themselves. So, it wasn’t just that turning 33 was thought unlucky for women — to be a woman at all was thought *very* unlucky.

The Daishonin asserted to Nichigen-nyo, though, that anyone can become a Buddha, “man or woman, monk or nun.” Anyone who embraces the Lotus Sutra. There are no “nobodies” in this teaching; anybody can become a “somebody.”

Before the temple issue began in 1990, many SGI-USA members, especially women, commented on the lack of women (not to mention non-Japanese) in the priesthood. In the SGI-USA, they saw a diversity of women taking leadership for the movement — but in the priesthood? It was the good ol’ boys from Japan.

Though there were certainly equality issues to be worked out within the SGI-USA, over the years we’ve seen real change, which continues to occur. The priesthood has remained hopelessly out of step with an age of women’s rights, however. It has thus discounted everything that the Daishonin wrote about human equality, not to mention the history of Buddhist nuns in Shakyamuni’s time and the Daishonin’s time.

Whatever has happened to “man or woman, monk or nun” in the priesthood? Where has the “anyone” of this passage gone?

In the SGI, we still maintain that anyone can become a Buddha. That’s why we keep sharing this Buddhism with old and new friends, believing each of them to be “anyone.” And that’s why we keep talking to our friends in the temple organization, who have been confused by Nikken but can still benefit from hearing the truth.

The 21st century will be the Century of Women, SGI President Ikeda has often said. It will also be the Century of Anyone — an era of the people; an era in which we will treat each other right, respecting one another as the “lords of all living beings” that the Daishonin said we are.

And we can’t wait.

Twelve in a series

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