

STANDS TO REASON: Submitting to the System

By JEFF FARR
Associate Editor

Life itself is the most precious of all treasures. Even the treasures of the entire universe cannot equal the value of a single human life. (“The Gift of Rice,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 267)

We don’t know when or to whom Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter, but we do know that the recipient sent him the simplest of gifts — some rice. “I have received the sack of rice...,” the Daishonin begins (MW-1, 267). It wasn’t easy living on Mount Minobu, and the Daishonin appreciated gifts like this, plain as they were, with all his heart.

Perhaps Minobu wasn’t the best place for the Daishonin to have retired: It was very cold; there was little food; it was far away from everything.

All this harshness made a dramatic backdrop to the close relationships that developed between the Daishonin and disciples who lived great distances away. They knew that his living situation was much worse than theirs, that all his letters were written amid the most trying circumstances, the most intense struggles. They knew how genuine was his appreciation.

In this letter, the Daishonin starts with a close-up on this precious gift of rice and then zooms out to show what he considered most precious of all: human life. “Even the treasures of the entire universe cannot equal the value of a single human life” — the Daishonin valued individuals one by one. More than anything else.

This was the Buddhist teaching, he believed.

The SGI’s and the temple’s interpretations of the Daishonin’s humanism clash, though. The temple says that integral to his humanism is the sharp distinction he supposedly makes between priests and lay believers. The temple pamphlet *100 Questions and Answers* (Question No. 32) claims that: 1) Nichiren Shoshu agrees with the idea that all people are equal; 2) but maintains that some people, namely lay people, just have heavier karma than “others,” namely priests.

It is a form of retribution to be an ordinary believer, an ordinary person.

“Even the treasures of the entire universe cannot equal the value of a single priestly life,” the priests want to say. How convenient for them!

To truly value human beings, one by one, means to do away with any notions of hierarchy. There is no system of ranking into which people can be placed. Any ranking is based on something completely imaginary.

Perhaps today’s society operates by *creating* distinctions among people — in this century, many a power broker has encouraged the formation of classes and other distinct groups in society so as to set himself atop them. If the people are so divided, there’s less chance that they’ll unite. That makes it easier for the powerful to keep the power.

The Daishonin was against this system. If he thought that people should be ranked and divided, he would have said so. He always said things straight.

It’s amazing that people submit themselves willingly to the temple’s ranking, ostensibly accepting the brand of inferiority. The priesthood says that visiting the head temple this August for the overseas believers pilgrimage is a great chance to see the Dai-Gohonzon, but it’s a trap: To see the Dai-Gohonzon, you have to get with this program; you have to purposefully disrespect the Daishonin’s spirit with which he inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon and purposefully disrespect yourself.

“I am inferior,” you have to say. Isn’t it sad that people want to do this?

Thirteen in a series

Title: Opinion: Submitting to the System

Subject: World Tribune 07/03/98 n.3198 p.2 WT980703p02

Author: Jeff Farr

Keywords: Daishonin Issue Major Nichiren Opinion Reason Stands Submitting System Temple Tribune World Writings