

## STANDS TO REASON: To Not Obey

By JEFF FARR

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**Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood. But instead they attacked me time and again, and finally had me banished to this island. (“Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 24)**

Who? This is one of the big questions that Nichiren Daishonin answers in this letter: Who can inherit the Law?

And who can attain enlightenment? Who can become happy? Who is the Daishonin teaching this Buddhism for? The answers are all in this letter.

Tendai Buddhism, like the Daishonin’s Buddhism, originally had the theory that all people are Buddhas. But as it spread from China to Japan, Tendai was combined with esoteric teachings — its humanistic core idea of Buddhahood was gradually lost. Tendai followers like Sairen-bo, to whom the Daishonin writes this letter, were thus left in the lurch; they were confused about what Buddhahood really was, and that equaled being confused about Buddhism’s general import.

The Daishonin emphasizes here to Sairen-bo, now converted to the Daishonin’s Buddhism, how he is “trying to *awaken all the people*.” So the answer is all people. Who can attain Buddhahood? All people can in the Daishonin’s Buddhism. All people can inherit the Law themselves through correct faith and practice.

Nichiren Shoshu’s current answer to this question is at odds with this. It’s only those who obey who can experience such an awakening. The priests say in *100 Questions and Answers*: “Obey the lifeblood.” “Obey the high priest.” “You must obediently receive the present high priest’s instruction.”

And then they say that those who are not priests “must strictly refrain from arbitrarily commenting upon this matter [the heritage of the Law].”

The priests’ message — obey, don’t ask questions — is as clear as the Daishonin’s, but the two are as far apart as they could be. When the Daishonin said that “if you are of the same mind of Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (MW-1, 93), he wasn’t ordering his believers to obey him; he was asking them to share equally in his spirit to save all people, to make his conviction that all people can inherit the Law their own.

Ordering people to obey you and asking them to share your compassionate conviction are certainly two very different things.

An organization like the temple’s, an organization that seeks everyone’s obeisance, can never embrace everyone. Indeed, there’s no such thing as an organization that *everyone* can *always* obey. Someone is always going to disagree with something, with some part of what the organization is doing or how it’s doing it. A beautiful thing about the SGI, especially in recent years, is how it embraces the members’ diverse views — how within the context of striving together to practice this Buddhism right and to make this the greatest organization we possibly can, various opinions are sought.

We don’t always agree on everything, and we aren’t expecting to, as the *World Tribune*’s “Mailbox” sometimes evidences. “Everyone has the right to speak out, to take action — this is democracy,” SGI President Ikeda says. “This applies across our membership, whether you hold a top leadership position or none at all.”

If you’ve ever seen the U.S. temples’ magazine, *Nichiren Shoshu Monthly* (there is no U.S. temples’ newspaper), you know that there’s nothing remotely resembling the

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“Mailbox” in there. Different opinions are just not fit for temple print. There is only one way of looking at things, and that’s the priests’ way.

Soon enough, these strange days of Nikken and his priests are bound to end. Maybe not so long from now, it will even be a little hard for people to believe that there was such a person as Nikken — such a high priest who demanded obeisance, who taught that the Daishonin’s Buddhism was all about obeisance. Such a strange time as ours may soon seem something slightly unreal to those who will only learn of it from us. Then it will be our responsibility to remember for them; we’ll share our memories not only of how Nikken tried to distort the Daishonin’s Buddhism but the stand we took in opposition; the words we spoke, the actions we took, to counter his demands.

All that we did to *not obey* his message.

*Nineteen in a series*

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