

STANDS TO REASON: Complete Responsibility

By JEFF FARR

Associate Editor

Faith alone is what really matters. No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire to wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith. (“The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 246)

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this 1279 letter to Shijo Kingo, who had just been attacked by his fellow samurai. These were his “co-workers,” jealous of the trust Lord Ema, their mutual boss, had placed in Shijo Kingo. The Daishonin, perceiving their envy, had often warned him to be careful around them — now Shijo Kingo knew why.

The Daishonin was an expert when it came to dealing with jealous peers. It seemed that there wasn’t a priest in all Japan who wasn’t jealous of him and the power of his teachings. As the Daishonin says in the letter I discussed last time (Sept. 25), he was “trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra” (MW-1, 24). This certainly included his priestly peers — but instead of listening to the Daishonin, instead of coming anywhere close to that awakening, they attacked and banished him.

In the face of all jealousy, all persecutions, the Daishonin says here that having faith is what’s most important; the way to overcome persecutions is through faith. This is closely related to the Daishonin’s view of the heritage of the Law, which I’ve been writing about the last several weeks: In inheriting the Law, it’s your faith that counts.

So, what is faith in the Nichiren Shoshu temples? And what is faith in the SGI organization? What’s the real difference?

Both sides say that having faith is to believe in the Gohonzon — but from there we depart. Specifically, we differ greatly as to where we say faith comes from.

The temple says that faith comes from the Gohonzon via the Dai-Gohonzon via Nikken. The high priest supposedly broadcasts faith from the Dai-Gohonzon through each Gohonzon that he sanctions. (If you have the “wrong kind,” then, you can’t pick up any signal.) One U.S. chief priest, in promoting the August Overseas Believers General Pilgrimage, said: “If you don’t have the Dai-Gohonzon, then the Gohonzon in your own home doesn’t work. That is the current situation with the Gakkai — SGI members’ Gohonzon don’t work.”

Meanwhile, the SGI says that faith comes from within you, that you are the broadcaster. The Daishonin also makes this point: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people.... The Gohonzon is found in faith alone” (MW-1, 213). He never says that “the Gohonzon is found through the Dai-Gohonzon.” He never says that “the Gohonzon is found through the high priest.”

If the Gohonzon is found in our faith alone, that means that we have to trust ourselves and the power of our faith. And this can be a challenging thing to do. Placing our faith in someone or something outside us is easier — it neatly frees us from having to take responsibility for our lives or for our world.

To accept that the power of our faith is the determining factor, then, means to take complete responsibility — a huge responsibility. The Daishonin thus tells Shijo Kingo that it doesn’t matter how hard he prays for him if there’s a lack of faith on Shijo Kingo’s end.

In Buddhism, taking responsibility — based on faith — is also how we inherit the Law. As the Daishonin states, “Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra” (MW-1, 25).

Twenty in a series

Title: Opinion: Complete Responsibility

Subject: World Tribune 10/02/98 n.3211 p.2 WT981002p02

Author: Jeff Farr

Keywords: Complete Issue Opinion Reason Responsibility Stands Temple Tribune World