

EDITORIAL: A Symbolic Death
By LISA JONES
Staff Writer

My eyes widened. My heartbeat paused. I wanted to say something — but what? The photos of the Grand Main Temple’s demolition stunned me. Pillars toppled, roof ripped, stripped down to its skeleton, bleak, mangled. I stared as if someone had just torn the wings off a butterfly.

SGI-USA members are expressing a wide range of emotions about the demolition. Some say: “It’s only a building. Get over it.” Some express outrage at Nikken, whom they liken to a bully on a beach who stomps on the sand castles of children — except that Nikken has a \$35 million arsenal of demolition explosives and heavy equipment at his disposal. Others express outrage at the SGI for not doing more to protect the building — rage that is sadly misplaced, I believe.

One member told me that she feels despair over the loss of the Grand Main Temple, as if a loved one has been senselessly killed. Yet another member said, “Good riddance,” glad that SGI members will no longer have any reason to feel sentimentally tied to the Head Temple Taiseiki-ji, home to Nichiren Shoshu and its erroneous teachings.

Many members have also said that the demolition has opened their eyes to Nikken’s true intent. For the first time since the temple issue came to light, they feel righteous anger. They now have a clear understanding of Nikken: that he embodies the destructive forces of fundamental darkness, which people must overcome to attain enlightenment. It has become clear to many people that the demolition is a calculated move designed to demoralize “the enemy,” the forces of the Buddha.

To me, the demolition is a symbolic death — and this death, I feel, is an integral component in the eternal cycle of rebirth and new growth.

In Greek mythology, Hades is the god of the dark underworld, the symbolic god of death. One story tells how he kidnapped Persephone and dragged her into the darkness to be his wife. Persephone was the joyful daughter of Demeter, the goddess of the earth and agrarian abundance, associated with growth and life. Demeter was so consumed with pain and grief over the theft of her daughter that the earth became barren and cold.

Demeter fought to get her daughter back, and Hades ultimately allowed Persephone to spend half of each year with her mother and half in the underworld with him. When Persephone resides in the realm of darkness, the earth is in winter. But when Persephone returns to her mother, spring arrives and flowers bloom.

This story is symbolic of the cycle of birth, growth, death and re-birth that we observe in all natural phenomena, such as the change of seasons. Whether we call it Hades or fundamental darkness, there is a force in life that functions to destroy, to pull downward, to abduct youthful joy and creativity and drag it into a cold winter of hibernation.

As Nikken pulls down the pillars of the Grand Main Temple and tries to grind the dreams of 8 million believers — as well as the Daishonin’s intent — under his heels, I feel the chill of fall and the inevitability of winter.

Like Demeter, I grieve. And like Demeter I fight back. I fight in my own heart and psyche, in the activities of daily life, for the return of Persephone — for a flowering of joy and creativity in our society, our world.

Fighting, I think, is the point. Fighting death, as Dylan Thomas wrote: “Do not go gentle into that good night, / Old age should burn and rave at close of day; / Rage, rage against the dying of the light.” And fighting for life, as seedlings fight their way through soil toward sunlight, or as a mother struggles to give birth.

Title: Editorial: A Symbolic Death
Subject: World Tribune 10/09/98 n.3212 p.14 WT981009p14
Author: Lisa Jones
Keywords: Death Editorials Issue Opinion Symbolic Temple Tribune World

The demolition of the Grand Main Temple is a death, I feel, but also the beginning of a new century of life, one that will be born of (and borne by) our determined struggles toward enlightenment — which is the ultimate triumph of light over darkness.

WT

Title: Editorial: A Symbolic Death
Subject: World Tribune 10/09/98 n.3212 p.14 WT981009p14
Author: Lisa Jones
Keywords: Death Editorials Issue Opinion Symbolic Temple Tribune World