

STANDS TO REASON: Clearing Up the Confusion

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It is a time when...truth and error stand shoulder to shoulder... At such a time, one must set aside all other affairs and devote one's attention to rebuking slander of the Law. (MW-5, 103)

Written in a Q-and-A format, this 1265 letter imagines a conversation between a sage and an unenlightened man that leads to the man saying he'll devote himself to Buddhism. Nichiren Daishonin's warning to the man, though, is that "devils and demons" will surely try to stop him from completing his new resolve (MW-5, 119).

On the one hand, this is a sort of encouragement to any new member: Be prepared for the obstacles that come in tandem with Buddhist practice, the Daishonin is saying. At the same time, he's explaining why he spent so much of his time and effort on "rebuking slander of the Law."

At any time when "truth and error" are confused, he teaches — at any time when correct and incorrect versions of Buddhism are out there competing for people's hearts — you have to concentrate on this problem. As someone who knows the correct practice, you have to take responsibility for distinguishing it so for others.

There are many opinions within the SGI-USA about the strong focus that we have placed on the temple issue in recent years. Some members, certainly, feel that it has been too much. We have to remember, though, that clearing up religious confusion was the Daishonin's main focus. This was, in fact, his impetus for seeking the correct Buddhist practice and introducing it to the world in 1253.

Presidents Makiguchi and Toda had the same determination in founding the Soka Gakkai: to clear up the spiritual confusion that they saw. Rebuking slander is, in this sense, what gave birth to the Soka Gakkai and then the SGI. It is our spiritual foundation as an organization.

To think that our strong stand against Nikken's slander is even in the slightest disconnected from what our organization is all about is to send ourselves away from our religious roots.

In America today, there is the danger that the U.S. priests will fool people who know neither side of the temple issue into believing that Nikken's Buddhism is the Daishonin's Buddhism. We find ourselves thus at a new crucial moment.

One of my favorite Martin Luther King Jr. speeches is from one of his crucial moments: During the 1963 Birmingham, Ala., movement, there came a point where many of his followers lost hope; they felt betrayed. Calling this moment "the midnight of oppression which we had believed to be the dawn of redemption," King said that they were facing "an extreme situation, and therefore our remedies must be extreme." They just had to try harder, King meant — it was, indeed, midnight.

The "extreme situation" of religious truth and error being so utterly confused in the Daishonin's day necessitated the strongly worded refutations of slander that he became known for. Today's similarly extreme situation — our temple issue — is no different.

It's midnight. We have to bring about dawn.

Twenty-one in a series

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