

Study Department Elementary Examination

The SGI-USA Study Department held the Elementary Examination on Oct. 25. Each answer was worth 3 points except for No. 11, which was worth 4 points. A perfect score was 100. (See box at the bottom of p. 10 for correct answers.)

“Letter to the Brothers”

[1] The Daishonin states: “The three groups of men of Learning, however, had to suffer through the period of sanzen-jintengo, and the great bodhisattvas, through that of gohyaku-jintengo, because of the sin they committed by discarding the Lotus Sutra.” Why is discarding the Lotus Sutra in particular such a terrible sin?

- (A) Discarding the Lotus Sutra shows disrespect to Shakyamuni who revealed that all people can equally attain Buddhahood.
- (B) The 28 chapters of the Lotus Sutra clarify and complete the Three Great Secret Laws.
- (C) The Lotus Sutra is an invaluable historical record of Shakyamuni’s teachings and guide for the future of kosen-rufu.
- (D) Discarding the Lotus Sutra is the same as denying the emergence of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth that is the basis for propagation in the Latter Day of the Law.
- (E) Discarding the Lotus Sutra is the same as denying the existence of one’s Buddha nature and losing the opportunity to manifest it.

[2] Nichiren Daishonin uses the analogies of a one-eyed turtle finding a piece of floating sandalwood and someone dangling Mount Sumeru from the sky with a fiber from a lotus stem to illustrate what point?

- (A) That Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism deals with physical as well as spiritual austerities.
- (B) This illustrates the difficulty and immense fortune of meeting someone who practices the Lotus Sutra correctly.
- (C) The Buddhism of the Latter Day of the Law uses parables and analogies as invaluable teaching tools.
- (D) Since “the Lotus Sutra is the eye of every Buddha,” these analogies illustrate how difficult it is to overcome our problems.
- (E) The analogy of the one-eyed turtle encourages us to keep both eyes open when doing gongyo so we will be able to challenge situations as difficult as dangling Mount Sumeru from a lotus stem.

[3] In “Letter to the Brothers,” the Daishonin encourages the Ikegami brothers and their wives from different perspectives. To the husbands he says: “Women are faint-hearted and your wives have probably given up. Yet you must grit your teeth and never slacken in your faith.” To the wives he says: “You two wives should have no regrets even if you are harmed by your husbands because of your faith in this teaching. If you both unite in encouraging their faith, you will follow the path of the Dragon King’s daughter and become the model for women attaining enlightenment in the evil Latter Day of the Law.” What is he teaching them about the attitude an individual should have in the midst of hardship?

- (A) The Daishonin is teaching them that women can only succeed in the midst of hardships if they

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- have husbands with strong faith.
- (B) He is teaching them that we must depend on close relationships with our spouses in the midst of hardships.
 - (C) Only by identifying the source of their persecutions can they become victorious.
 - (D) The Daishonin is teaching them that what is most important is to develop resolute faith to stand alone in the midst of hardships.
 - (E) According to the social customs of the time, the Ikegami brothers and their wives should take a conciliatory attitude and follow the rules of filial piety.

Answer questions 4 and 5 based on this quote from the Maka Shikan: “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere.... You should be neither influenced nor frightened by them. If you fall under their influence, you will be led into the paths of evil. If you are frightened by them, you will be prevented from practicing true Buddhism.”

[4] From where do the three obstacles and four devils ultimately originate?

- (A) They originate from our fundamental darkness.
- (B) They originate from philosophies that deny the dignity of human life — the opposite of what Buddhism teaches.
- (C) From occurrences in the phenomenal world of the Latter Day of Law when there is no respect for the Law.
- (D) They originate from faults in our character that can be overcome through human revolution.
- (E) From the negative attitude and influence of people who follow other teachings.

[5] Explain why obstacles are confirmation we are progressing toward enlightenment.

- (A) Obstacles appear when we devote ourselves to the practice of the true Law.
- (B) Obstacles show we are practicing incorrectly.
- (C) Obstacles alert us to the weaknesses in our environment.
- (D) Obstacles illustrate a weakness in our faith and practice.
- (E) Obstacles in Buddhism only appear in the last stage before we reach enlightenment.

[6] In the passage, “One should become the master of his mind rather than let his mind master him,” what does ‘mastering one’s mind’ mean?

- (A) To be the master of one’s mind means to recognize someone who has greater knowledge of Buddhism and follow them.
- (B) To be the master of one’s mind means to gain control of our earthly desires.
- (C) To be the master of one’s mind means we no longer are influenced by the opinions of others.
- (D) To be the master of one’s mind means to follow the ego of the lesser self.
- (E) To be the master of one’s mind means to base our thoughts, words and deeds on the supreme state of Buddhahood, which we tap through our daimoku.

“The Person and The Law”

[7] What is one of the points Nichiren Daishonin is making through the story of Tokusho Doji and his mud pie?

- (A) When making offerings to the Law, benefit comes from one’s relationship with the Law in past lives rather than from the material value of the offering itself.

- (B) The value of the offering and one's sincerity are equally important to the Buddha.
- (C) The benefit resulting from donations will be in direct proportion to the greatness of the teaching or the person to whom they are made.
- (D) Shakyamuni understood that Tokusho Doji would change his fortune through Buddhism and be able to make invaluable offerings in the future.
- (E) The Buddha has the power to turn even mud pies into valuable offerings.

[8] Explain why we call Nichiren Daishonin “the original Buddha”?

- (A) Because he was the first to expound that everyone possesses the Ten Worlds and could reach enlightenment.
- (B) Because he directly revealed the original Law eternally inherent in the universe by which all Buddhas attain their enlightenment.
- (C) Because before the Daishonin all previous teachers separated the Buddha and the common mortal.
- (D) Because he directly revealed the physical origins of the universe and the impact that this still has on our lives today.
- (E) Because he was the first historical Buddha as well as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

Answer the following questions based on this passage: “Although I live in such a forsaken hovel, deep in this mortal flesh I preserve the ultimate secret Law inherited from Shakyamuni Buddha at Eagle Peak. My heart is where all Buddhas enter nirvana, my tongue, where they turn the wheel of doctrine; my throat, where they are born into this world; and my mouth, where they attain enlightenment.”

[9] What does the statement “I preserve the ultimate secret Law inherited from Shakyamuni Buddha at Eagle Peak” refer to?

- (A) This statement appears in the twenty-first chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which Shakyamuni transfers the essence of the sutra to Taho Buddha, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and charges him with its propagation in the Latter Day of the Law.
- (B) This statement appears in the twenty-first chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which the supernatural powers inherent in the lives of common mortals in the Latter Day of the Law are revealed.
- (C) This statement appears in the twenty-first chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which Nichiren Daishonin revealed the Three Great Secret Laws.
- (D) This statement appears in the twenty-first chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which Shakyamuni transfers the essence of the sutra to Bodhisattva Jogyo, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and charges him with its propagation in the Latter Day of the Law.
- (E) This statement appears in the twenty-first chapter of the Lotus Sutra in which Nichiren Daishonin, represented by Bodhisattva Jogyo, inherited supernatural powers from Shakyamuni and transcended the realm of the common mortal.

[10] Explain the following passage in terms of the life of Nichiren Daishonin: “Since the Law is supreme, the Person is worthy of respect; since the Person is worthy of respect, the Land is sacred.”

- (A) Since Nichiren Daishonin was enlightened, any law he might have taught at any location would have been sacred.
- (B) Since Nichiren Daishonin was upholding the Law and propagating Buddhism he was not concerned with improving his physical surroundings.

- (C) This explains that the environment is more important than the Person.
- (D) Because Nichiren Daishonin was enlightened to the ultimate Law, he was worthy of supreme respect and where he lived was the Buddha land.
- (E) This explains how Nam-myoho-renge-kyo has supernatural powers that transcend the Person and the Land.

“Ichinen Sanzen” — A Single Moment of Life Possesses Three Thousand Realms

[11] When T’ien-t’ai writes, “Life at each moment is endowed with the Ten Worlds,” he means that within a single moment of life there exists the potential for ten conditions. List the Ten Worlds (in English). An extra point will be given for listing them in order from the lowest world to the highest.

[12] Choose the answer that best explains the concept of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

- (A) Because life and the environment are one, we possess the Ten Worlds mutually with the universe itself. When we manifest a higher world, so does the universe.
- (B) The six lower worlds and the four noble worlds are not mutually exclusive.
- (C) Life in any of the Ten Worlds contains all the other worlds within it. A person in any world has the potential to manifest any of the other nine worlds.
- (D) The Ten Worlds are included in the 3,000 worlds contained in a single moment of life.
- (E) The Ten Worlds are mutually possessed by all people.

[13] Contrast the six lower worlds and the four noble worlds.

- (A) Because of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, the six lower worlds are equal to the four noble worlds.
- (B) The six lower worlds are passive reactions to the environment and require no effort to experience, while the four noble paths are attained only through deliberate effort.
- (C) The three evil paths and the four noble paths are all necessary to attain enlightenment.
- (D) People must first experience the six lower worlds to achieve the four noble worlds.
- (E) The process of manifesting any world or state of life is ultimately dependent on our environment regardless of our effort.

[14] Explain the major differences between the world of Bodhisattva and the worlds of the two vehicles.

- (A) People of the two vehicles tend to look down on others who have not reached their level of understanding while bodhisattvas not only aspire to supreme enlightenment but also help others to do the same.
- (B) The primary concern of people in the world of Bodhisattva is to attain their own enlightenment in this lifetime so they can return as Buddhas in the future and teach the Law to others. People of the two vehicles focus on their development in this lifetime.
- (C) People of the two vehicles have a clearer understanding of enlightenment while bodhisattvas are only practice oriented.
- (D) People of the two vehicles have grasped the truth but cannot master Buddhist austerities. A bodhisattva has mastered both.
- (E) Since people of the two vehicles are concerned with learning, they are compassionate toward others while bodhisattvas only aspire to their own supreme enlightenment.

[15] Among the ten factors, that of “consistency from beginning to end” explains that both the beginning and end are inseparable. What is one of the ways the ten factors define the “beginning” and the “end”?

- (A) The first factor, appearance, is the beginning and the tenth is itself the end.
- (B) The first three factors are the entity (beginning) and the next six factors are its function (end).
- (C) The ten factors explain that there is no beginning and no end.
- (D) The ten factors are the beginning and the Ten Worlds are the end.
- (E) The first five factors — appearance, nature, entity, power and influence — are the beginning and the last four are the end.

[16] The realm of the environment also possesses the Ten Worlds. What is the difference between the environment and living beings?

- (A) Since the physical environment is independent of the living beings, it is unaffected by the state of life of the people. Living beings — being just a small part of the environment — cannot escape its influence.
- (B) Living beings are transitory in that they go through the process of birth and death repeatedly whereas the physical environment is permanent.
- (C) The universe is a special entity that has its own Ten Worlds independent of living beings.
- (D) Living beings are one with the environment and therefore always subject to its changing circumstances.
- (E) The environment has no independent life-condition; it manifests one or another of the Ten Worlds in response to the life-condition of the living beings inhabiting it.

Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra

[17] President Toda described the differences in the way the Lotus Sutra was expressed in the Former, Middle, and Latter Day of the Law as the “manifold Lotus Sutra.” What do these various Lotus Sutras have in common?

- (A) It is the teaching that all bodhisattvas must emerge from the Earth before kosen-rufu can be achieved.
- (B) It is a teaching that makes it clear that only those directly connected to the priesthood can attain enlightenment.
- (C) It is the teaching that is only accessible to certain people.
- (D) It is a teaching that emphasizes that you receive punishment if you fail to practice correctly.
- (E) It is the teaching that everyone equally has the potential to become a Buddha.

[18] How did the Daishonin read the Lotus Sutra with his life?

- (A) By practicing with the spirit of not begrudging his life.
- (B) By learning the profound theories of all 28 chapters of the Lotus Sutra.
- (C) By just reciting the sutra.
- (D) By gathering disciples and preaching the sutra to them since most could not read it themselves.
- (E) By practicing austerities and living in isolated environments.

[19] How can we attain the wisdom of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?

- (A) Through study only.
- (B) Through faith.

- (C) Through strictly following Buddhist formalities.
- (D) Through practicing austerities exactly as Shakyamuni did.
- (E) Through our relationship with the high priest.

[20] What was the Daishonin's sole intention during his lifetime?

- (A) It was to accomplish the widespread propagation of the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra and enable all people to become knowledgeable about Buddhism.
- (B) His sole intention was to reveal his true identity as the original Buddha and clarify that all other Buddhas were provisional.
- (C) It was to accomplish the widespread propagation of the Law and enable all people to attain Buddhahood.
- (D) His sole intention was to disprove the erroneous teachings of other Buddhist sects.
- (E) It was to solidify the literal foundation for his Buddhism so there would be no question in the future as to the meaning of his teaching.

[21] Where does the world of Buddhahood appear?

- (A) The world of Buddhahood is the tenth world and appears separate from the other nine worlds when an individual has reached enlightenment.
- (B) It appears only in the unity of believers who focus exclusively on their own enlightenment.
- (C) It appears in the lives of people who have mastered the philosophy of the Lotus Sutra.
- (D) It appears within the nine worlds in the lives of common people who chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.
- (E) The world of Buddhahood only appears at the moment of death for those who have chanted Nam-myoho-rence-kyo their entire lives.

[22] What are we praising when we do gongyo?

- (A) We praise Shakyamuni Buddha for giving us the Lotus Sutra.
- (B) We praise Taho Buddha who is represented in the Lotus Sutra by the figure of Bodhisattva Jogyo.
- (C) We praise the Law of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo and our innate Buddha nature.
- (D) We praise all Buddhist statues, which represent the common people.
- (E) We praise all of Shakyamuni's sutras, which are of equal importance.

"The One Essential Phrase" I & II

[23] According to Nichiren Daishonin, what was the significance of lady Myoho-ama asking the question "Can one attain Buddhahood just by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo?" and what is the importance of asking such questions?

- (A) Asking this question is one of the six difficult acts and is extremely rare and a source of good fortune.
- (B) Asking this question shows one is interested in studying Buddhism but has not exerted effort to do so.
- (C) Asking this question is one of the six difficult acts, which means one would have no trouble in challenging the nine easy acts.
- (D) Asking this question is an action more powerful than any of the supernatural acts.
- (E) Asking this question reveals one's doubts and is a challenge to the Daishonin's teachings.

[24] What is the basis for attaining Buddhahood in your present form?

- (A) The basis for attaining Buddhahood in your present form is nothing more than theoretical study.
- (B) The basis for attaining Buddhahood in your present form is through practicing just for yourself.
- (C) The basis for attaining Buddhahood in your present form is sacrificing yourself for others.
- (D) The basis for attaining Buddhahood in your present form is to graduate from being a Bodhisattva of the Earth.
- (E) The basis for attaining Buddhahood in your present form is chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

[25] Nichiren Daishonin explains that “Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is only one phrase, but it contains the essence of the sutra.” What does this quote mean?

- (A) The single phrase Nam-myoho-enge-kyo can be divided into twenty-eight parts representing the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra.
- (B) The single phrase Nam-myoho-enge-kyo means that everything in the universe can be reduced to a single entity.
- (C) The single phrase Nam-myoho-enge-kyo can be the origin of many sutras to come in the future.
- (D) The single phrase Nam-myoho-enge-kyo can only be understood by understanding the philosophy contained in the Lotus Sutra.
- (E) The single phrase Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the key that unlocks the limitless energy of life. The Gohonzon of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo contains all the wisdom of Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra that can be tapped through chanting daimoku with faith.

[26] Why does everything become a source of value when we base ourselves on daimoku?

- (A) Everything becomes a source of value when we base ourselves on daimoku because we have the wisdom to comprehend and apply recent advances in science and technology.
- (B) Everything becomes a source of value when we base ourselves on daimoku because all of our thoughts, words and deeds are based on our enlightened life-condition.
- (C) Everything becomes a source of value when we base ourselves on daimoku because it eliminates our need to take excessive action.
- (D) Everything becomes a source of value when we base ourselves on daimoku because it allows us to manifest the six mystic powers that would otherwise remain dormant.
- (E) Everything becomes a source of value when we base ourselves on daimoku because we free ourselves from all problems.

[27] What does it mean to “ceaselessly chant daimoku” in terms of our practice?

- (A) It means that when we are chanting daimoku, to continue chanting past the first impulse to stop.
- (B) It means to keep our minds continually on our prayers when chanting daimoku.
- (C) It means to continue the practice of chanting daimoku throughout one’s life.
- (D) It means that life is eternal and if we are chanting daimoku in this life, we will definitely do so in the next life.
- (E) It means chanting daimoku endlessly every day as our basic practice.

[28] In his lecture President Ikeda explains that “It is precisely when faced with challenging circumstances that we need to pray.” He also explains what the nature of our faith and prayer should be. What aspects of faith will lead us to our dreams.

- (A) Using our common sense from the Gohonzon and giving up when it seems hopeless leads us to our dreams.
- (B) Offering concrete prayers and taking action until results are produced will lead us to our dreams.

- (C) The spirit to stand alone and base our actions on our own ego will automatically lead us to our dreams.
- (D) Having a seeking mind for the advice of our fellow members will definitely lead us to our dreams.
- (E) Praying alone is sufficient to lead us to our dreams.

[29] Explain the relationship between prayer and action.

- (A) Action must precede any prayers.
- (B) Prayer and action are unrelated.
- (C) Instinctive actions are the bases for sincere prayers.
- (D) Prayers are always more important than actions.
- (E) Earnest prayers become manifest in action.

“Questions and Answers on the Temple Issue” (pamphlet)

[30] “You, yourself, are a true Buddha who possesses the three enlightened properties. You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction” (MW-1, 30). The attitude of Nichiren Daishonin was one of appreciation, respect, service and support of the believers. What attitude below is consistent with what the temple teaches?

- (A) The doctrine of absolute clerical superiority.
- (B) Nichiren Shoshu staunchly asserts that it is a “sin” or great conceit to speak of the equality of priests and lay practitioners.
- (C) Lay believers can only attain enlightenment through the priesthood.
- (D) All of the above.
- (E) None of the above.

[31] “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 213). What does Nichiren Shoshu say about this concept?

- (A) The temple’s stance is that the Gohonzon is the manifestation of Nichiren Daishonin’s life and it is no different than the enlightened potential within all ordinary people.
- (B) The temple’s stance is that the Gohonzon is the embodiment of the Daishonin’s wisdom and compassion and he inscribed it so that all people can awaken to the same wisdom and compassion.
- (C) The temple’s stance is that the Gohonzon represents the Buddha nature, which exists equally within all people.
- (D) The temple’s stance is that believing the Law or the Gohonzon to exist within one’s life is arrogant and will send that person to the incessant sufferings of hell.
- (E) The temple’s stance is that attaining Buddhahood can be accomplished solely by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon.

[32] During World War II, what prompted presidents Makiguchi and Toda to defy the high priest’s instructions to accept an object of worship from another religion?

- (A) They understood that the high priest’s instructions went beyond the authority invested in the office of high priest.
- (B) They foresaw the time when the priesthood would turn against the kosen-rufu movement.
- (C) As leaders of the lay organization, they were ready to follow Shintoism.
- (D) They viewed all other religions as evil.

(E) They understood that the high priest's instructions violated the Daishonin's teachings.

[33] Nichiren Daishonin warns us that to fail to understand the fundamental principles of faith will make our practice an "endless painful austerity," and that without correct understanding, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra. In light of the priesthood issue, what constitutes correct faith?

- (A) Correct faith means to view things as Nichiren Daishonin taught, share his convictions and practice in accord with that understanding.
- (B) Correct faith changes according to the capacity of the people to understand Buddhism; therefore, we need to constantly update our understanding.
- (C) Correct faith is a personal matter and cannot be grasped from outside sources.
- (D) Correct faith means to accept austerities as part of life.
- (E) Correct faith is understanding the literal meaning of all twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra.

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